

WASHINGTON, DC—Today, House Democrats expressed outrage at reports from the Washington Post that the Bush Administration has eliminated or restructured scientific advisory groups at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This has been done in an apparent effort to ensure that scientific advice provided conformed with the Administration's positions on issues ranging from human research subjects to the health effects of exposure to toxic chemicals. House Democrats today released a request to Secretary Tommy Thompson asking him to provide Congress with information on all scientific task force changes that have occurred since President Bush took office.

“It is deeply disturbing that the Department has replaced scientists whose only sin appears to be that they don't share the Administration's preconceived notions about health and environmental impacts. The American people deserve better,” said Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR). “Coming on the heels of the recent EPA report on air pollution that for the first time failed to mention greenhouse gases, this move threatens to marginalize the critical federal role in protecting public health and the environment.”

The Washington Post reported today that the Bush Administration has begun a broad restructuring of the scientific advisory committees that guide federal policy areas including public health and the health effects of exposure to toxic chemicals. In addition to eliminating certain scientists, the Administration has started hand-picking replacements, many of whom have strong links to regulated industries.

“Those charged with protecting the public health have an obligation to make their decisions based on science - not on a political philosophy,” Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said. “Science advisory committees have historically been able to do their job without political interference. Changing that tradition presents a serious risk to the health and safety of Americans. I hope that Secretary Thompson will respond to us quickly with an explanation to this disturbing report.”

Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) speculated that “if the Bush Administration were seeking advice on whether the sun revolved around the earth or vice versa, they would take Galileo off the committee and replace him with the Inquisition.”

The letter sent by Democrats today requests that HHS provide:

- 1) A list of all scientific advisory groups, committees or task forces to the Department of

Health and Human Services (HHS), and their memberships, that existed as of January 19, 2001 2) A list of the scientific advisory groups, committees or task forces that have since been eliminated, and the reason for their elimination. 3) A list of the changes to the membership or chairmanships of these scientific advisory groups, committees or task forces, whether departures of members were voluntary or at the request of the Bush Administration, the names and affiliations of new members or chairpersons, and whether new members were asked about their views on stem cell research, cloning or abortion prior to their appointment.

“By replacing the leadership of these scientific committees, President Bush has cast doubt on every conclusion that these groups will make. This is a classic example of putting the fox in charge of the hen house,” said Rep. Hilda Solis (D-CA).

In another example of the Bush Administration's flagrant subversion of science, in April of this year, the Bush Administration forced the ouster of Dr. Robert Watson, chair of the United Nations Panel on Climate Change. Dr. Watson is an American scientist who for nearly six years directed the international panel of experts assessing global warming. He was a widely respected and outspoken advocate of the idea that human actions - mainly burning oil and coal - are contributing to global warming and must be changed to avert environmental upheavals.

In 1995, then Governor George Bush called for the resignation of all of the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, and replaced them with agricultural and chemical industry representatives who had a record of opposing the regulation of pesticides and air pollutants. These commission replacements occurred at the same time that Texas was considered number one in overall toxic releases, recognized carcinogens in the air, suspected carcinogens in the air, developmental toxins in the air (affecting brain and nervous-system development in children), and cancer risk. As President, he has methodically appointed former industry leaders to high-level positions within his Administration.