

Message

From: Wilcox, Jahan [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=88FD588E97D3405D869BCAE98D391984-WILCOX, JAH]
Sent: 12/8/2017 3:06:04 PM
To: Shawn McCoy [shawn@insidesources.com]; Press [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b293283291dc44e0b5d1c36be9281d8a-Press]; [REDACTED] Ex. 6
Bowman, Liz [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=c3d4d94d3e4b4b1f80904056703ebc80-Bowman, Eli]; Bowman, Liz [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=c3d4d94d3e4b4b1f80904056703ebc80-Bowman, Eli]
Subject: RE: Final Request for Comment

I have left Ethan a voicemail.

From: Shawn McCoy [mailto:shawn@insidesources.com]
Sent: Friday, December 8, 2017 10:03 AM
To: Wilcox, Jahan <wilcox.jahan@epa.gov>; Press <Press@epa.gov>; [REDACTED] Ex. 6
<Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>; Bowman, Liz <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: Final Request for Comment

Ethan's number: [REDACTED] Ex. 6

From: Wilcox, Jahan [mailto:wilcox.jahan@epa.gov]
Sent: Friday, December 08, 2017 9:24 AM
To: Shawn McCoy <shawn@insidesources.com>; Press <Press@epa.gov>; [REDACTED] Ex. 6
<Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>; Bowman, Liz <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>
Subject: RE: Final Request for Comment

I just tried to call you.

From: Shawn McCoy [mailto:shawn@insidesources.com]
Sent: Thursday, December 7, 2017 8:10 PM
To: Press <Press@epa.gov>; Wilcox, Jahan <wilcox.jahan@epa.gov>; [REDACTED] Ex. 6
<Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>; Bowman, Liz <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>
Subject: Final Request for Comment

Hey all,

The story below is set to publish tomorrow. I will wait until noon to hear back.

If you need it, I would be happy to provide you with additional time to review and respond to the information presented in the article. Just please email or call me, and let me know how much additional time you will need in order to get back to us.

But as I have been trying to get any type of response from the EPA related to this for the past week, I'm guessing you're not planning to respond.

This will be the first of a series of articles we plan to continue reporting on the EPA's media relations. Early next week, we have a full interview with Andrew Haffner that we plan to publish.

I would strongly encourage you to please reach out and discuss this with me. I spent a lot of my career working on GOP campaigns. We have a number of mutual friends. I understand some of the pressures you face in your jobs. I would enjoy the opportunity to discuss this article in greater detail. I'm happy to do so off the record if you would feel more comfortable.

I hope to hear back from you.

All the best,
Shawn

Shawn McCoy
Publisher
InsideSources.com

Ex. 6

e-mail: shawn@insidesources.com

Intimidation, Personal Attacks, and Silence: The EPA's Press Strategy Under Pruitt

By Ethan Stoetzler

In the months since Scott Pruitt took over as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, he has dedicated the agency to rolling back regulations, in favor of the production of coal, expanded oil enterprises, and giving more authority of the management of natural resources back to their respective states. No doubt, these issues are often divisive along party lines, just as they were when the Obama administration implemented its agenda. Pruitt has been true to not only his word, but also the positions that Donald Trump advocated as he campaigned for office.

What is unusual about the implementation of Pruitt's agenda has been a strategy implemented by the EPA's press office that seems out of place in American democracy. Since the beginning of Pruitt's tenure, the EPA has been routinely threatening reporters with action by law enforcement, launching false personal attacks on journalists, cutting reporters off of press releases, limiting media access, and displaying an unprecedented level of hostility toward the media.

Just last week, an InsideSources reporter was escorted by a Story County Sheriff's Deputy out of an EPA event at an Iowa farm in which Administrator Scott Pruitt was the keynote speaker. The reporter received no formal explanation as to why he was being removed. Subsequent attempts by InsideSources to speak with EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox were left unanswered.

The use of police force to keep events closed to members of the media is not an isolated incident in Pruitt's EPA. Neither is the EPA's silence as to why media is being discouraged from coming to appearances of the administrator.

Back on August 9, Andrew Haffner, of the Grand Forks Herald in North Dakota, reported that two Herald reporters were threatened by Wilcox to leave a Pruitt event at the Energy and Environmental Research Center (EERC) at the University of North Dakota (UND), or else police — whom Wilcox referred to as “security” — would remove them from the premises. Haffner told InsideSources that he had been to the EERC several times before, as his beat for the Herald is education. While the EERC has an independent structure from the university, the center's lobby is open to the public, which is where Haffner stood with a camera, waiting for Pruitt to arrive.

A UND police officer eventually arrived and told Haffner and his co-reporter that the grounds were private property, then demanded they move away from the center's front doors and across the street, where protesters were standing. Both reporters then noticed that Pruitt's motorcade was approaching the center and towards what Haffner described as a back loading bay. Haffner motioned to his co-worker to make their way to the back to take photos of Pruitt, where they then were stopped by a police vehicle.

According to former EPA Spokeswoman Liz Purchia Gannon, the EPA's strategy of blocking press access to Pruitt is very similar to the strategy employed by the White House communications team under President Trump.

"They're tightly controlling Pruitt's public events and interviews, which isolates him from most Americans and instead plays to Trump's base because that's who they prioritize," Gannon said. "They're not trying to use communications tactics to reach a broad audience."

When Haffner later returned to the press conference following Pruitt's closed roundtable, he was told that the event was still private, though Haffner assured them that he in fact had been invited to this particular portion of the day. Wilcox then approached Haffner, and after an exchange, accused Haffner of cooperating with protesters. Wilcox told Haffner that when he had called his fellow reporter over to take pictures of Pruitt, that Haffner was in fact coordinating protesters.

"He was insinuating I was in fact trying to set up a bit of a stunt with the protesters, which was honestly not the case," Haffner said.

The EPA press office now seems to be making a habit of accusatory and personal attacks against journalists. This behavior was exhibited again back in September, following an Associated Press story [documenting](#) Hurricane Harvey. Reporters Michael Biesecker and Jason Dearen wrote that the EPA was not present at at least five flooded "so-called" Superfund sites. EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman responded to the story with personal attacks on Biesecker, calling his reporting "yellow journalism," and accusing him of not even visiting the sites, claiming that he was in Washington, D.C. at the time. Ignored entirely in the EPA's statement was Dearen, who did in fact visit the sites.

Another instance occurred as documented in the [Washington Post](#) on October 27. Bowman and Wilcox had an email exchange with New York Times reporter Eric Lipton, in which both Bowman and Wilcox employed media practices that virtually any PR professional would describe as highly unusual. Bowman and Wilcox refused to confirm the title and start date of a senior EPA employee to Lipton. It is standard practice for a federal agency to be able to provide confirmation of this information. Rather, they referred Lipton to reporting from other media outlets. Lipton responded to explain that reporters can avoid making errors by requesting confirmation from a primary source. Wilcox then accused Lipton of trying to steal other reporters' work.

In addition to the EPA's strategies of using police force to remove reporters and attempting to tarnish reporters' credibility, the EPA also employs the strategy of keeping Pruitt's meetings with elected officials and industry leaders private. It's not just keeping his appearances private, however. A source close with media covering the EPA has said that several prominent reporters have been removed from the EPA's press list, effectively cutting them off from the flow of information.

Even when press conferences are scheduled following Pruitt's meetings, Pruitt is usually not featured in them. InsideSources has found over 12 instances in which Pruitt has held closed door meetings with elected officials and invite-only citizens and industry, leaving both reporters and the public without answers as to why they are being neglected.

Gannon said that by not publicizing Pruitt's events, the EPA will be limiting the opportunities for Pruitt to be exposed and for people to protest.

"He doesn't hold press conferences or gaggles when traveling or at events because they leave too much vulnerability," Gannon said, "and open the door for reporters to ask him questions that he doesn't want to talk about."

For example, in a story published on August 2, in the [Indianapolis Star](#), it was reported Pruitt visited Indiana as part of his "State Action Tour" the day prior, meeting with Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb (R), Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and "other state officials," according to a release sent by the EPA press office in the late afternoon. After his visit, Pruitt hosted a roundtable at Mike Starkey Farms in Boonville but "made no effort to also meet with environmental groups like The Hoosier Environmental Council, the Nature Conservancy's Indiana Chapter, the Sierra Club's Hoosier Chapter, Citizens Action Coalition, Conservation Law Center, and the Indiana Water Environmental Association." The story said all were unaware of the visit.

In fact, Pruitt's taxpayer-funded visits often neither include an announcement he is visiting the area or any time actually speaking with the public. On August 4, Pruitt visited the Gold King Mine in Colorado, but did not notify the local newspaper or the public, according to [Jesse Aaron Paul](#), political reporter for the Denver Post. According to Paul's twitter thread, the "EPA refused to acknowledge Administrator Scott Pruitt will be at the Gold King Mine today and then [sent] him on local TV."

Paul tweeted that media was not allowed to attend the Gold King tour with Senators Michael Bennet (D) and Cory Gardner (R), and Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper (R). Paul tweeted that there was to be a town hall in Durango, Colorado, but that the event was announced "about 24 hours before it happened -- and [was] for 45 mins." Paul also tweeted that the EPA sent out a news release the day prior to his tweets showing Pruitt meeting with Colorado farmers. The press was not given prior notice that he was in the state.

Not everyone agrees that allowing the media to serve as a watchdog of public officials is inherently a good thing, especially in the Trump era. A GOP media operative who advised the Trump campaign said that barring biased journalists from public appearances was a "long overdue strategy," but the source was deeply surprised that the EPA's press team acted with such hostility to InsideSources.

"Most American reporters are effectively Democratic operatives," the operative said in an email, "so the Trump campaign barring partisan 'journalists' from events was brilliant and a long overdue strategy for the GOP. That said, many outlets, like InsideSources, provide fair coverage and therefore should be treated with the respect and access that real journalists deserve. The EPA should focus on kicking Democratic operatives with journalist credentials out of events--not fair and balanced news outlets like InsideSources."

To be fair regarding Pruitt's enhanced security presence, according to [CNN](#), the EPA's inspector general is in the process of investigating more than 70 threats against Pruitt and others at the agency, nearly five times as many as the previous chief, Gina McCarthy, received. The EPA has increased security for Pruitt by "a dozen" agents, whose salaries alone are to cost minimum \$2 million per year. The agents are to give Pruitt 24-hour security, which the inspector general said had never been done for a chief, prior. In that story, Bowman declined to comment on the enhanced security to protect the administrator.

But while enhanced security for the personal protection of Pruitt can be understandable, the EPA is also spending tax dollars on a private sound proof booth for his use. According to a [New York Times story](#), the EPA has signed a \$25,000 contract to build a completely sound proof "privacy booth" to be placed at EPA headquarters. According to the story, the EPA wanted a "secure phone and computer room, essentially for sensitive information."

The company, Acoustical Solutions, has worked with government offices since 2007 to create soundproof rooms and provide acoustic insulation. But even Steve Snider, a salesman for the company, described the EPA's request and customizations as "unusual."

Wilcox was repeatedly emailed to offer the EPA's perspective on its behavior towards the media. He was asked whether the EPA plans to continue using law enforcement to remove journalists from events, whether it is appropriate for the EPA press team to launch false personal attacks on reporters, and whether Pruitt has specifically directed his press team to undertake these actions. Wilcox has not replied to these inquiries.

Erin Mundahl reported and contributed to this story.