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From: POLITICO Pro Energy Whiteboard
Sent: Thur 6/8/2017 7:45:19 PM
Subject: GAO says EPA falls short on advisory board policy

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06/08/2017 03:40 PM EDT

EPA fell short on recent orders from Congress to update the agency's policy statement for the Science Advisory Board, according to a report issued today by the Government Accountability Office.

A spending bill passed in 2015 directed EPA to ensure its SAB policy included a way to evaluate bias if the administrator wants "financial-related metrics" to "identify conflicts of interest or bias." EPA critics have long complained that SAB and other advisory panels are weighted toward researchers who receive research grants from the federal government.

The spending bill also directed EPA to study ways of increasing state membership and methods for considering public comment.

However, GAO says EPA fell short on all counts. "EPA did not update its policies or requirements for the SAB as directed by the explanatory statement," the report said.

A draft document did not delve into the financial metrics because agency staff use the "existing legal and policy framework," including Office of Government Ethics rules. The other directives also came up short, and the agency has yet to finalize the document, GAO said.

While the report made no recommendations before the guidance is finalized, GAO said EPA should keep the criticisms in mind.

Administrator Scott Pruitt made waves last month when he declined to re-appoint nine members of the Board of Scientific Counselors, a separate entity from SAB that advises EPA on research issues. Observers also say EPA is behind on finding a new chair for the seven-member Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee.

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