



governmentattic.org

"Rummaging in the government's attic"

Description of document: **Investigation closing memoranda for two National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of Investigations cases involving Alleged Suppression of Science and Censorship of Scientists, 2008**

Requested date: 30-December-2008

Released date: 20-February-2009

Posted date: 17-March-2009

Titles of Documents Alleged Science Suppression at ARC, May 7, 2008
Alleged Suppression of Science and Censorship of Scientists, September 29, 2008

Source of document: OIG FOIA Officer
Assistant Inspector General for Investigations
NASA Office of Inspector General
300 E Street S.W. Suite 8V39
Washington, DC 20546-0001

The governmentattic.org web site ("the site") is noncommercial and free to the public. The site and materials made available on the site, such as this file, are for reference only. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals have made every effort to make this information as complete and as accurate as possible, however, there may be mistakes and omissions, both typographical and in content. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information provided on the governmentattic.org web site or in this file. The public records published on the site were obtained from government agencies using proper legal channels. Each document is identified as to the source. Any concerns about the contents of the site should be directed to the agency originating the document in question. GovernmentAttic.org is not responsible for the contents of documents published on the website.



FEB 20 2009

SUBJECT: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request
OIG FOIA Request Number 2009-11

I am responding to your January 2, 2009, FOIA request that was received by the OIG on January 13, 2009. You requested the closing memo and final report for the following two NASA OIG investigations:

- 1) Alleged Science Suppression at ARC
- 2) Alleged Suppression of Science and Censorship of Scientists

My initial determination is to provide you the enclosed redacted documents which respond to your request. Portions of the documents and case numbers are being withheld under FOIA exemption (b)(2), which protects internal matters of a relatively trivial nature. 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(2). Names of individuals (including OIG Special Agents, witnesses, informants, and individuals that have been investigated) and other personally identifying information are being withheld where necessary to protect personal privacy under FOIA exemption (b)(7)(C). 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(7)(C).


The investigative summary from the "Alleged Suppression of Science and Censorship of Scientists," has been published on the NASA OIG website. It can be accessed online in the NASA OIG Reading Room found at the address below.

<http://oig.nasa.gov/investigations/invest-index.html>.

You have the right to appeal this initial determination to the Inspector General. Under 14 CFR § 1206.605(b), the appeal must: (1) be in writing; (2) be addressed to the Inspector general, NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC 20546; (3) be identified clearly on the envelope and in the letter as an "Appeal under the Freedom of Information Act"; (4) include a copy of the request for the Agency record and a copy of the contested initial determination; (5) to the extent possible, state the reasons why the requester believes the contested initial determination should

be reversed; and (6) be sent to the Inspector General with in 30 calendar days of the date of receipt of the initial determination.

Sincerely,


for Kevin H. Winters
Assistant Inspector General for Investigations
OIG FOIA Officer – Investigations

Enclosure



b2

May 7, 2008

ALLEGED SCIENCE SUPPRESSION AT ARC

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM/CASE CLOSING: As previously reported, b7c
b7c alleged that scientific reporting was suppressed at the Ames Research Center
(ARC). b7c alleged b7c boss,

b7c discouraged and preventing b7c from reporting Earth Science issues, specifically the
ARCTAS science mission involving climate change research.

After being interviewed twice, b7c continued to contact the Reporting Agent concerning these
issues. b7c provided emails from b7c, a retired ARC PAO employee containing data
which indicated b7c involvement with the science suppression issues at NASA HQ. None
of the materials b7c provided indicated b7c was attempting to suppress b7c scientific
reporting.

The crux of the allegation involved b7c desire to travel to Alaska in April to cover ARCTAS,
which b7c in other emails, indicated was not logistically feasible given the demands of
ARC's PAO during that particular week. Therefore b7c seemed to be exercising b7c
management prerogative concerning personnel and resources.

Even more to the point, b7c tried to enlist the support of senior NASA HQ and ARC officials
to sway b7c decision. This appeared to backfire on b7c, as evidenced by the email chain
provided to the Reporting Agent, when b7c explained the reasons for b7c decision on
coverage of the ARCTAS mission, and those senior officials withdrew their support.

b2

b2

b7c

CLASSIFICATION:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This document is the property of the NASA Office of Inspector General and is on
loan to your agency. Contents may not be disclosed to any party under investigation
nor may this document be distributed outside the receiving agency without the
specific prior authorization of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.

no further action is warranted

b2

DISTR: File

b7c

CLASSIFICATION:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This document is the property of the NASA Office of Inspector General and is on loan to your agency. Contents may not be disclosed to any party under investigation nor may this document be distributed outside the receiving agency without the specific prior authorization of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.



12

September 29, 2008

ALLEGED SUPPRESSION OF SCIENCE AND CENSORSHIP OF SCIENTISTS

Office of Public Affairs
NASA Headquarters
Washington, DC 20546

CASE CLOSING: On September 29, 2006, 14 United States Senators cosigned a letter to the NASA Inspector General to request a formal investigation into allegations of “political interference” with the work of scientists at NASA. In particular, the letter conveyed the Senators’ concern with apparent and “repeated instances of scientists . . . having publication of their research and access to the media blocked, solely based upon their views and conclusions regarding the reality and impacts of global warming.” The letter also identified areas of specific concern coupled with a request for this Office “to conduct a full and thorough investigation into the suppression of science and censorship of scientists at NASA.”

Accordingly, the NASA Office of Inspector General conducted an administrative investigation to examine reports of alleged “political interference,” predominantly by senior NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs officials, with the work of NASA scientists pertaining to climate change—to include whether NASA inappropriately prevented one of its scientists, Dr. James E. Hansen, from speaking to the media in December 2005.

Our investigation found that during the fall of 2004 through early 2006, the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs managed the topic of climate change in a manner that reduced, marginalized, or mischaracterized climate change science made available to the general public through those particular media over which the Office of Public Affairs had control (i.e., news releases and media access). The OIG also concluded that the climate change editorial decisions were localized within the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs; the OIG found no credible evidence suggesting that senior NASA or Administration officials directed the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs to minimize information relating to climate change. To the contrary, the OIG found that once NASA leadership within the Office of the Administrator were made aware of the scope of the conflict between the Office of Public Affairs and scientists working on climate change, they aggressively implemented new policies with a view toward improved processes in editorial decision-making relating to scientific public affairs matters.

Further, it is our conclusion that the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs’ actions were inconsistent with the mandate and intent of NASA’s controlling legislation—the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958 (Space Act) and NASA’s implementing regulations—

b7c

CLASSIFICATION:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This document is the property of the NASA Office of Inspector General and is on loan to your agency. Contents may not be disclosed to any party under investigation nor may this document be distributed outside the receiving agency without the specific prior authorization of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.

insomuch as they prevented “the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination” of information concerning NASA’s activities and results. While the OIG could not substantiate that Administration officials employed outside NASA approved or disapproved or edited specific news releases, the OIG do, however, find by a preponderance of the evidence that the claims of inappropriate political interference made by the climate change scientists and career Public Affairs Officers were more persuasive than the arguments of the senior Public Affairs officials that their actions were due to the volume and poor quality of the draft news releases. Although the scientific information alleged to be “suppressed” appeared to be otherwise available through a variety of Agency forums, the OIG cannot reconcile that the Space Act would permit *any* purposeful obfuscation of scientific research by the Agency in *any* news dissemination forum as “appropriate” under the Act.

The supporting evidence detailed in this report reveals that climate change scientists and the majority of *career* Public Affairs Officers strongly believe that the alleged actions taken by senior NASA Headquarters Public Affairs officials intended to systemically portray NASA in a light most favorable to Administration policies at the expense of reporting unfiltered research results. Senior NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs officials (political appointees) deny such actions, claiming that many of the proposed news releases were poorly written or too technical in nature for meaningful broad public dissemination.

With respect to NASA’s climate change research activities, the OIG found no evidence indicating that NASA blocked or interfered with the actual research activities of its climate change scientists. In contrast to our findings associated with the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs, the OIG found that NASA systematically distributed its technical climate change research throughout the scientific community and otherwise made it available through a variety of specialized forums, such as scientific journals, professional conferences, and public appearances by NASA scientists. Further, our recent audit of NASA’s formal process for releasing scientific and technical data resulting from research conducted by its employees and contractors found no evidence that the process was used as a means to inappropriately suppress the release of scientific or technical data at the four NASA Field Centers reviewed. Of the 287 authors surveyed at those Field Centers, none indicated that they had experienced or knew of someone who had experienced actual or perceived suppression of their research by NASA management. In short, the defects the OIG found are associated with the manner of operation of the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs and are largely due to the actions of a few key senior employees of that office.

Regarding media access, our investigation confirmed that, contrary to its established procedures, the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs declined to make one of NASA’s scientists, Dr. James E. Hansen, available for a radio interview with National Public Radio in December 2005. Our investigative efforts revealed that NASA’s decision was based, in part, on concern that Dr. Hansen would not limit his responses to scientific information but would instead entertain a discussion on policy issues. NASA maintains that the decision to deny media access to Dr. Hansen was unilaterally made by a junior Schedule C political appointee in the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs.

CLASSIFICATION:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This document is the property of the NASA Office of Inspector General and is on loan to your agency. Contents may not be disclosed to any party under investigation nor may this document be distributed outside the receiving agency without the specific prior authorization of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.

Regardless of the aforementioned Space Act standards, the OIG otherwise found that the Agency mismanaged this activity insomuch as it occurred over a sustained period of time until senior management was eventually alerted by congressional staff and the media. That senior management did not know before then was emblematic of ineffective internal management controls such as a dispute resolution mechanism between contributing scientists and public affairs officials. This is especially true in that relations between NASA's climate change science community and the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs had somehow deteriorated into acrimony, non-transparency, and fear that science was being politicized—attributes that are wholly inconsistent with effective and efficient Government. The investigation also uncovered that one of the underlying contributing factors of these problems may have, in fact, been in the very structure of the NASA Headquarters Office of Public Affairs, where political appointees were placed in the seemingly contradictory position of ensuring the “widest practicable” dissemination of NASA research results that were arguably inconsistent with the Administration's policies, such as the “Vision for Space Exploration.”

The OIG provided a draft Investigative Summary to the NASA Administrator on March 6, 2008, for the purpose of soliciting the Agency's comments. The Agency's comments were received on April 18, 2008. On June 2, 2008, our final investigative summary was disseminated to all interested parties.

DISTR: File

b7c

CLASSIFICATION:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This document is the property of the NASA Office of Inspector General and is on loan to your agency. Contents may not be disclosed to any party under investigation nor may this document be distributed outside the receiving agency without the specific prior authorization of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations.