



PEERreview

A Publication of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Confronting the Rise of Authoritarianism

After ten months of the Trump administration, it is important to recognize that the fate of our work protecting public employees and the environment is dependent on our ability to combat the rise in authoritarianism and promote democratic values in our country.

That raises an important issue: how can we be more effective in our work as the political and legal world changes so rapidly around us? While it is very difficult to predict the future, it is clear we are entering a new era where we must all rapidly adapt to the changes around us and prepare for a long fight for what we believe in.

The Rise of Authoritarianism

Since President Trump took office, the administration has embarked on vindictive campaigns to control the press, punish political opponents, and consolidate power in the hands of the President in ways we have never seen in this country. The administration's authoritarian tactics are apparent to anyone who follows the news.

Some of those tactics we have been fighting against include:

- Conducting mass purges of public employees.
- Installing loyalty oaths for new hires.
- Increasing surveillance of federal employees to gauge their political leanings.
- Firing public employees for carrying out laws enacted by Congress.
- Cracking down on the free speech rights and rights of association of federal employees.
- Destroying independent government science and attacking scientists.
- Ignoring Congressional appropriations.

Those of us who care about democracy, the environment, and the humane treatment of government workers know the coming months will pose difficult challenges as the administration ramps up its efforts to consolidate power before next year's elections.



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK ANDRZEJ TOKARSKI

In these changing times, we are staying motivated, fighting, helping public employees tell their stories, countering misinformation with truths, and working with our allies to create the conditions necessary for change.

We also know that in the coming months, the work of non-governmental organizations will become more important as our cases work their way through the courts and administrative bodies. These cases take on added urgency as President Trump recently issued a memorandum authorizing government-wide investigations into non-profits, activists, and their funders, using labels of "terrorism" and "conspiracy against rights."

There are Signs of Hope

Although our political system is clearly broken, there are signs of hope.

First, most of the legal issues that underpin our lawsuits have not been fully settled. It is important to continue to fight these cases for as many years as necessary – giving up would be exactly what the administration wants.

Second, we are beginning to see pushback in Congress across the political spectrum against some of the more extreme actions of the President. We will do our part to make sure our elected leaders in Congress hear and understand the important work of our federal agencies.



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PEERreview is the quarterly newsletter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

In this edition of PEERreview, you will see some of the extraordinary work that PEER staff and our allies are doing in these very difficult times.

As I am writing this note, we are confronting a government shutdown and the rapid unfolding of an authoritarian playbook in this country. On page 1, we discuss how we are addressing this new reality and developing new strategies and tactics for our federal work.

On pages 6 and 7, you will see how we are also making a difference for our public lands by exposing and challenging the harm done by this administration to our national parks and to forest service lands. While political appointees at the Department of the Interior view public lands as an underutilized financial “asset,” the American people and PEER view them as something to be cherished and protected.

On page 9, we talk about how we are confronting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s efforts to dismantle climate change regulations. Throughout the country, people from all walks of life and all types of organizations and businesses are challenging the crackpot science that the administration has ginned up to overturn over a decade of progress trying to minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

Also, throughout this edition of PEERreview, you will see the challenges, heartbreak, and destruction that federal workers are facing under this administration. It is unprecedented and dystopian in nature.

At PEER, we have seen a twentyfold increase in the number of government employees coming to us for legal assistance. We will use all administrative and legal remedies to protect our clients and to seek legal and legislative recourse for the harms they have suffered. This battle is not over—in fact, it is just beginning.

This edition of PEERreview contains much more about our work and why it is so important. I hope you will take a moment to read it through and contact me if you have any questions about what we are doing.

Although these times are difficult, we are proud to play a unique and important role in helping protect our country and in ensuring all human beings, including federal workers, are treated with the respect they deserve.

With gratitude.

Tim Whitehouse

About Us

PEER protects public employees who protect our environment. We are a service organization for local, state, federal, and tribal public employees, including scientists, law enforcement officers, land managers, and all others dedicated to upholding environmental laws and values. Through PEER, public servants can choose to work as “anonymous activists,” so that public agencies must confront the message, rather than the messenger.

PEER Adds Litigation Assistant to the Legal Team

PEER recently hired its first Litigation Assistant to meet rising demand for our services. Kaylee Rodriguez joined PEER this summer, bringing her experience as a former legal assistant at the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Environment and Natural Resources Division.

As a litigation assistant, she will support PEER's legal program by providing administrative support to attorneys, helping manage our intake system, and tracking our FOIA docket, among other things.

Rodriguez has an educational background in public policy, environmental science, and journalism—which she believes ties in perfectly to PEER's unique work.

Rodriguez states that she was drawn to PEER because, “in addition to providing essential legal support to public employees working to protect the environment, PEER uses storytelling to draw attention to important—but lesser known— issues and uses its audience to advance support for better policies.”

Prior to joining DOJ, Rodriguez spent her summers interning at non-profit organizations focused on environmental advocacy, promoting civic engagement in South Florida, and providing access to immigration legal services.

Her interest in environmental protection and appreciation for the natural world stems from growing up in Miami, the only city nestled between two national parks: Biscayne and Everglades. She hopes to



Kaylee Rodriguez joins PEER from the Department of Justice.

pursue a career as an attorney focused on advocating for people impacted by a changing climate, including those in her hometown.

NASA

Loosing Oversight of Outer Space at the Worst Time

PEER is probing concerted behind-the-scenes efforts by the Trump administration to block science-based oversight of a vast expansion of industrial operations in space and the growing influence of private industries over the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

One emerging tactic is “pocket rescissions” to block scientific reviews and shield favored industries from scrutiny.

A key casualty is efforts by NOAA, the National Science Foundation, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study the anticipated impacts of projected commercial space activities on the atmosphere. One major concern is that tens of thousands of satellite launches and reentries could alter stratospheric temperatures and ozone coverage because of the massive

discharge of metals, such as aluminum, lithium, and copper, and chemicals into the atmosphere.

One recent study found satellites reentering the Earth's atmosphere could contribute enough alumina to the stratosphere to alter wind speeds and temperatures in the polar regions by 2040. Another found that ongoing and planned rocket launches could delay ozone recovery.

Three projects alone – SpaceX's Starlink, China's Guowang Megaconstellation, and Trump's Golden Dome – will account for tens of thousands of new satellites in space, increasing the environmental impacts on earth.

We are excavating the paper trail behind this effort to quietly quash research that

could draw negative attention to companies like SpaceX or projects like Golden Dome. Our atmospheric health may depend upon it.



PHOTO: AAPSKY

A growing problem. The 12,000 satellites in orbit today may grow as high as 100,000 by 2030, discharging an ever-expanding deluge of debris on our atmosphere.



DISSENT & FREE SPEECH

Declarations of Dissent Across the Government

Protecting the Right to Dissent under the Trump Administration

As the Trump administration works to quash all dissent, the very health of democracy in the U.S. depends on people willing to shine a light on corruption and wrongdoing in their agencies. A recent series of dissent letters signed by employees across the federal government helps to do that by documenting the devastation this administration is inflicting on agencies responsible for protecting public health, safety, and the environment.

As a result of this, federal workers are raising the alarm. Here are some examples:

- The Bethesda Declaration, the first in the series of dissent letters, outlines the public health and credibility concerns of hundreds of National Institute of Health (NIH) employees about the direction of the agency.
- A letter from over 620 current and former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) employees raises concerns related but

not limited to the agency's undermining of science alongside cuts to research offices and acquiescence to polluters.

- Letters from hundreds of employees at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) emphasize the critical loss of institutional knowledge and major setbacks in research that will impact future generations.
- A letter from over 180 current and former Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) employees highlights the agency's reduced capability to fulfill its mission due to unqualified leadership, interference from other agencies, and major program cuts.

Does Free Speech Apply Only to Trump Allies?

On the first day of his second term, Trump signed an Executive Order entitled "*Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship*," denouncing the prior administration's trampling of "free speech

rights" to advance its "preferred narrative about significant matters of public debate."

However, the administration has made it clear that free speech applies only to Trump and his allies. Leadership at EPA and FEMA moved swiftly to place a total of nearly 200 public dissent letter signatories on administrative leave, emphasizing the Trump administration's intolerance for dissenting views.

EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin declared, "We have a ZERO tolerance policy for agency bureaucrats unlawfully undermining, sabotaging, and undercutting the agenda of this administration," without specifying which law signatories allegedly breached.

At EPA, employees were left on leave for nearly two months before the agency moved forward with disciplinary actions against some of the signers, ranging from letters of reprimand to terminations, with minimal explanation for the disparate outcomes.

Our Response

In response to these threats, PEER continues to build up our legal work to protect public employees across the government, from retaliation as part of these ongoing purges and to provide counsel to those who wish to report wrongdoing by the government or express public dissent about government actions.

Today, public employees are confronting excruciatingly difficult ethical, financial, and legal decisions in their careers and are being forced to choose between conscience and career.

Through the courts, public action, and publicity, we aim to provide support for those who are willing to speak truth to power and help turn the tide against these betrayals of public trust.

Historic Conowingo Agreement

Maryland announced a historic agreement with Constellation Energy to fund and implement improvements and environmental projects at the Conowingo Dam. The agreement was negotiated in partnership with Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeepers Association.

The agreement marks 16 years of tremendous efforts by riverkeeper groups and their partners to assure the dam is relicensed with conditions that protect the health of the Susquehanna River

and the Chesapeake Bay.

In 2022, PEER filed an amicus brief on behalf of Republican and Democratic lawmakers in support of a lawsuit against the relicensing of the dam without adequate conditions to mitigate the environmental risks to the Chesapeake Bay, the nation's largest estuary. PEER also produced a video, which received over 10,000 views.

Congratulations to those who led this effort. We were glad to play a part in the lawsuit that led to this agreement.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

EPA Shuts Down its Science Arm

As part of the Trump administration's war on science, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin is closing the agency's Office of Research and Development (ORD).

ORD's science, data, and research support all of EPA's work protecting public health. It conducts and funds research, and provides technical services in support of the agency's mission.

Zeldin has been laying off and forcing out scientists in record numbers and slashing budgets for the remaining EPA scientists. With ORD eliminated, those scientists who remain will work in policy offices or in the Administrator's Office. One reason ORD has been a separate office since 1970 was to protect its scientific work from policy-oriented biases and political interference.

"Lee Zeldin is working hard to fulfill industry's wish to shut down all of EPA's independent science work," stated PEER Science Policy Director Kyla Bennett, a scientist and attorney formally with EPA.

"Scientific research is vital to EPA's core mission of protecting public health and the environment, but that mission has now been completely abandoned."

PEER points out that the liquidation of EPA research is:

- Making EPA even more dependent on research from chemical companies, which is often framed to mask, rather than identify, health and environmental risks.
- Rendering EPA far less capable of evaluating the toxicological effects of chemicals.
- Jettisoning research into the long-term effects of pollutants, such as particulate matter.

Facing decimation is ORD's ability to generate scientific information on cancer and other health effects of chronic exposure to eco-contaminants from its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS). Local, state, and federal agencies, as well as tribes, use



Scientists Packing Up. EPA is abandoning a more than half-century commitment to basic scientific research.

IRIS data, which is vital in executing EPA's responsibilities under the Clean Air, Safe Drinking Water, and Clean Water Acts. Not surprisingly, eliminating IRIS is a top industry goal.

The ultimate fate of EPA's scientific capacity looks grim. This grim prognosis can be turned around through advocacy and willingness in Congress to rein in the administration's effort to destroy independent science at EPA.

Get PFAS Out of Our Food Chain

To accomplish its mission, the recently created Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission must stem human exposure to toxic "forever chemicals" in our foods, according to a petition from public health groups led by PEER.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are called "forever chemicals" since they do not readily break down in the environment and bioaccumulate within the human body. Human exposure to PFAS is associated with cancers and an array of other adverse effects.

The petition highlights three human exposure pathways in foods that the MAHA Commission should address:

- Biosolid fertilizers made from sewage sludge contain high levels of PFAS, which are taken up by fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, and dairy. Nearly 20% of U.S. agricultural land has already been contaminated through the application of sludge-based fertilizers.
- The fluorination process used to manufacture an estimated 200 million plastic containers creates PFAS in their linings, which can then leach

into their contents.

- Pesticides containing PFAS are routinely sprayed on staple foods such as corn, wheat, kale, spinach, apples, and strawberries.

We cannot make America healthy again if our foods are poisoned with toxic PFAS.

You can sign our petition at peer.org/petition-tell-epa-to-get-pfas-out-of-pesticides/





NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Parks System in Free Fall

For over 100 years, the National Park System has played a key role in inspiring a global conservation movement. But today, the National Park Service (NPS) is under attack and in disarray like never before.

Actions taken by the Trump administration and Interior Secretary Burgum over the past 10 months amount to state-sanctioned vandalism of our National Park System by leaders who have failed to articulate a vision or an end goal for their actions.

Since January 2025, NPS has lost about one-quarter of its permanent workforce, on top of a 20% decline since 2010. These losses, driven by a hiring freeze, pressured buyouts and retirements, and a pending reduction in force, are devastating the agency's ability to protect park resources and ensure visitor safety.

On top of this staffing crisis, Secretary Burgum ordered the consolidation of key administrative functions in the Department of the Interior – IT, communications,

finance, human resources, and contracting – into the Office of the Secretary. This move has further stripped NPS of essential staff capacity, disrupted park operations, and created significant accountability gaps at NPS. As part of this transfer, NPS is being charged \$2,000 plus 111% of each consolidated employee's salary and benefits, diverting critical resources from an already underfunded agency.

All of these changes are occurring without an NPS Director in place or even a nominee for the role. Meanwhile, most of the NPS regional director slots are vacant and there are about 100 vacant park superintendent positions.

At the same time, national parks must deal with edicts from Burgum that all park interpretative displays be stripped of anything that could be interpreted as “negative” or “disparaging,” casting aside historical accuracy and cultural context. These edicts inject corrosive politicization into park interpretive displays, lectures,



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK_DLR24114

Something's Gotta Give. National parks are seeing a return to record visitation with substantially fewer staff.

and tours, which are supposed to educate rather than merely placate.

In addition, park planning requirements for considering long-term impacts and alternatives are undergoing radical truncation. Consequently, road-building and other development inside national parks will be harder to stop or moderate, regardless of park resource damage. And, since NPS scientific specialists are fast disappearing, there will be little capacity to even assess those impacts.

PEER's Response to this Freefall

The damage done by this administration to the NPS in the past ten months is dramatic. Worse yet, the park system has not touched bottom yet, as the impact of several actions has yet to be fully felt, and they will not be easily or quickly reversed. Fortunately, there has been growing pushback across the country and in Congress to Burgum's vandalism of the NPS.

To respond to this free fall, PEER and its allies have been documenting the consequences of these actions and recommending responses to the administration's actions, which can be found in a new report, *Protect Every Park and*

the Staff Who Steward Them: A Call to Congress to Defend America's National Parks.

PEER and its allies are calling on Congress to:

- End the hiring freeze and allow the NPS to fill new positions.
- Oppose any NPS-wide reduction in force and require a legal review of its validity.
- Require NPS to report workforce levels by park, region, and program, alongside impacts from recent administrative actions.

- Reverse DOI staff consolidation pending a full, transparent review shared with relevant Congressional committees.

This cannot be done by non-profit groups alone. Citizens must engage directly with their elected representatives to urge them to protect national parks and the federal employees who work there.

Visit peer.org/report-protect-every-park-and-staff-who-steward-them/ or scan the QR code (right) to view the report.



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Dismantling of the Forest Service

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is using a variety of tools to cripple the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), an agency within USDA that manages 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands across the United States.

Reorganization Fiasco

PEER is leading individuals and groups in opposing the USDA's proposal to eliminate the USFS's nine Regional Offices, transfer thousands of employees from headquarters to regional hubs, and consolidate six of its seven Research Stations.

Regional offices are essential to wildfire preparedness, safety oversight, and local land management, and are not “redundant bureaucracy”, as claimed by the USDA Secretary. Each regional forester oversees dozens of national forests within their region. They provide budget oversight, implement national policies, facilitate coordination among the forests, and other federal, state and local agencies, and interface with the private sector and the public.

USDA's plan would weaken community connections, erode vital scientific research, and worsen staff shortages at a time when the Service is already strained by an increased workload addressing climate change, wildfire, drought, and growing recreation pressures. Since President Trump took office, the Service has endured significant staff losses from the firing of probationary employees, DOGE program cuts, and the departure of employees who left after they accepted deferred resignation offers.

Wildfire as a Scapegoat

We are also opposing the administration's efforts to use wildfire as a scapegoat and rationale to greatly and immediately expand logging in the U.S. The administration has declared 112 million acres of forest need to be logged for wildfire prevention and national security reasons.

Increased fire dangers in our forests are a real threat; however, they are largely due to increasing temperatures and aridification due to climate change, continual battles against exotic invasive species, and greater visitation to Forest Service lands. These factors increase the risk of wildfire on our national forests and grasslands. Additionally, historic management included eliminating fire from forests to protect timber resources. This, along with the past removal of large fire-resistant trees and clear-cutting, has contributed to the “high fuel loads” of many national forests.

Looking Ahead

The pushback of citizen groups against these proposed changes has already resulted in growing Congressional opposition to



PHOTOS: ADOBESTOCK, GUSTAVO

The Trump Administration is using an “emergency declaration” to expand logging in national forests by easing environmental protections and cutting staff.

some of the more extreme proposals by USDA regarding the Forest Service.

PEER's job is to continue our work with current and former public employees to document the negative impacts of these proposals. Today's challenges of wildfire, drought, and climate change require more resources and expertise, not fewer.

Mismanaging a Mission

In August, we published a report, *Mismanaging the Mission: Weakening the Agency Responsible for our National Forests*.

The report documents how the Forest Service Mission is being compromised by the Trump administration's chaotic and unscientific management of the agency, and how this is impacting the nation's ability to fight wildfires and is causing resource damage, increasing risks to human safety, harming visitor experiences, and causing negative economic impacts.

Visite peer.org/report-mismanaging-the-mission-weakening-agency-responsible-national-forests/ or scan the QR code (right) for the report.





SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY

Facts Lose All Meaning in Service of Trump

The abrupt removal of the top economist for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in August after she issued a report showing weaker than expected job growth was more than strongly reminiscent of the classic Hans Christian Andersen tale, *The Emperor Has No Clothes*. This action set off alarm bells that the Trump White House would now be cooking economic data to reflect a false, rosy outlook.

That episode was quickly followed by another fiasco. Just days after the Senate confirmed Dr. Susan Monarez as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Trump fired her for failing to show sufficient deference to the idiosyncratic vaccine theories of the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

This came in the wake of President Trump rescinding all scientific integrity policies

promulgated under Biden and launching an effort to establish a new scientific “Gold Standard” (what else could it be?), full of buzzwords bereft of any definable rigor.

For more than a quarter century, PEER has pioneered the pursuit of creating a Law of Science with enforceable protections for the integrity of technical data as well as for the careers of the specialists creating and analyzing that data. It has taken abuses by past presidents to push forward the idea that scientific integrity, as it has come to be known, is a critical hallmark of good government.

The attacks on science and the blatant abuses by the current administration strengthen a growing consensus that any system for ensuring scientific integrity that relies upon self-policing by the Executive Branch is doomed to failure and further corruption. Progress requires judicially enforceable channels



PHOTO: DOL

Speed Bump for the Truth. Trump summarily removed Dr. Erika McEntarfe as the Commissioner of Labor Statistics following a disappointing jobs report

of dissent, rights to publish data, and whistleblower-like anti-retaliation protections for scientists who raise politically inconvenient truths.

PEER takes on ‘Voluntary’ Loyalty Oaths

After the White House and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) jointly announced that “each job application graded GS-05 or above” must respond to “four short, free-response essay questions,” including one asking how they “would help implement” the Trump agenda if hired, PEER filed a complaint with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. Our complaint pointed out that the proposed essays are a blatantly illegal attempt to impose a political loyalty test – a violation of statutory requirements that personnel decisions must be based solely “on merit.”

In response, OPM issued “Additional Guidance” to agency hiring and human resource officials that answering these

essay questions is “not a requirement” and “answers to these questions are not scored or rated.” Further, essay answers “must not be used as a means of determining whether the candidate fulfills the qualifications of a position.”

Even if they are supposedly “voluntary,” these questions are a transparent attempt to inject a political litmus test into federal hiring. Moreover, there is no oversight to ensure that these questions will not be used in candidate selection.

Once the political dust in Congress settles, we will press Congress to block any funding for these crude political loyalty tests, whether answering them is voluntary or not.

“How would you help advance the President’s Executive Orders and policy priorities in this role?”

Identify one or two relevant Executive Orders or policy initiatives that are significant to you and explain how you would help implement them if hired.”

“Voluntary” essay question for federal job applicants

CLIMATE CHANGE

Opposing Attacks on Climate Change Science

PEER has filed comments strongly opposing U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin's proposed repeal of all greenhouse-gas emission standards for gas vehicles.

Calling climate change “a hoax,” President Trump sought a billion dollars in campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry to make good on his promise to jettison climate regulations. Zeldin's goal is to deliver for Trump.

The Endangerment Finding

Standing in their way is the 2009 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Endangerment Finding, a meticulously researched multi-year scientific effort that clearly confirmed that six greenhouse gases are impacting the climate and constitute a threat to public health and welfare.

The Endangerment Finding, which has been affirmed repeatedly by courts including the U.S. Supreme Court, allows EPA to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas pollution from power plants, cars and trucks, and oil and gas operations.

To support the repealing of the Endangerment Finding, EPA relied on a draft report by the “Climate Working Group,” a group of climate skeptics convened by the Energy Secretary Chris Wright. Unsurprisingly, the critiques of this report have been devastating. A review by 85 climate scientists concluded that the draft report “fails to adequately represent the current scientific understanding of climate change” and “does not meet standards of quality, utility, objectivity and integrity appropriate for use in supporting policy making.”

Further, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine recently concluded EPA's 2009 finding “was accurate, has stood the test of time, and is now reinforced by even stronger evidence.”

Clean Cars and Truck Standards

The gas vehicle standards which Zeldin is trying to kill have been a huge success, helping reduce climate pollution and saving Americans thousands of dollars on fuel and maintenance costs. No doubt if Zeldin decides to end these standards the issue will end up in court.

The Illegal Gang of Five

Before being appointed as Energy Secretary, Wright was the CEO of Liberty Energy, North America's second largest hydraulic



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK_MARENWINTER

Racing to pollute. Zeldin is seeking to undo gas vehicle standards which have helped reduce climate pollution.

fracking company. He does not deny that climate change is occurring but contends that it is merely “a manageable problem.” And he clearly thinks he is the guy to manage it.

When tasked with eliminating the Endangerment Finding, he convened five known climate skeptics whose prior writings suggested they could be counted on to deliver a report Wright could use as a legal lever to do the job. He gave them 60 days to write a report – and they did not disappoint.

One small problem is that he violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which requires that repeated private industry advisory meetings with federal officials first be announced in the Federal Register and the meeting minutes and materials be made available to the public.

In a lawsuit filed on August 12, two weeks after the Department of Energy (DOE) report was released, groups charged that this DOE “Climate Working Group” was illegally created and conducted its work in secret in violation of FACA. Moreover, its very existence was not disclosed until its report was published. The suit seeks to enjoin the DOE and EPA from using the report in any agency action.

On September 3, Sec. Wright dissolved the Climate Working Group. It remains to be seen if Secretary Wright's missteps will be fatal to his climate gambit.



PEER PERSPECTIVES

Dollops of Incongruous Good News



International Court of Justice President Yuji Iwasawa

The United Nations' top court has ruled that countries are obligated to take "appropriate action" to protect the planet from the eco-havoc of climate change, declaring that a "clean, healthy and sustainable environment" is a human right. The Court found climate change poses an "urgent and existential threat" to the planet. Judge Iwasawa opined that each country "has to do its utmost" to contribute to solutions. The ruling opinion now goes to the UN General Assembly to enforce, but the short-term prospects for meaningful progress are dimmed by the climate denial posture of the Trump administration.



Federal Chief Information Officer Gregory Baraccia

In a response to a question from a CNBC host on the displacement of federal workers by AI, the new Federal Chief Information Officer said, "We are not trying to displace people. We are trying to make them more efficient." Baraccia continued that the administration is asking, "How can we automate these mundane, repetitive tasks and empower the human workers through computer-human symbiosis to do things that only a human can do and a human should do?" Unspoken by Baraccia in his robotic-like answer are the massive and federal data breaches of personal and company data by DOGE officials since Trump took office, and the increased high-tech surveillance of federal workers using AI and other tools. AI firms are selling their wares to federal agencies in a gold rush with no transparency, oversight, or clearly articulated purpose or goals.



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore

As President Trump has rescinded environmental justice mandates and dismantled aid programs, Maryland has gone the opposite direction, launching an effort to address disproportionate pollution impacts on low-income communities. A key element of Gov. Moore's initiative is an environmental justice mapping tool to replace a similar U.S. Environmental Protection Agency map which Trump ordered discontinued. In contrast to Trump, Gov. Moore contends that protecting marginalized communities benefits the entire state and its economy, calling this approach "the next chapter in our work to cut exposure to pollution, improve access to clean public transit, reduce urban heat islands, and uplift neighborhoods that have been left behind."



Those Who Helped Clean Up the Chicago River

After extensive cleanup efforts, one of the Country's previously most befouled bodies of water is now considered safe for swimming. The Chicago River's first official open-water swim since 1927 was held this September, with hundreds of eager international swimmers plunging into its chilly waters. The moment was a fitting capstone celebration of the impacts of the Clean Water Act, local government action, and the advocacy of groups such as Friends of the Chicago River. The river's water quality has seen steady improvement thanks to enhanced wastewater processing, the installation of wetlands, and a public campaign encouraging residents to reduce pressure on their sewer systems during heavy rain events.



Acting CDC Secretary Jim O'Neill

When Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy fired the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Secretary Susan Monarez for refusing to bend to his anti-vax views, he appointed Jim O'Neill as the CDC's Acting Director. O'Neil lacks any training in medicine or infectious disease science. His resume does include a history of voicing public support for multiple COVID treatments unsupported by scientific evidence. After working as a speechwriter for George W. Bush, O'Neill went on to work for the tech investor and conservative megadonor Peter Their, co-founder of Palantir Technologies. His main goal, O'Neill says, is to clean up the culture of the CDC. The question is for whom?



Those Pushing Back Against the Pesticides Industry

Some members of Congress are trying to sneak language into a must-pass 2026 funding bill that would effectively block state and local pesticides regulations. In response, a coalition of hundreds of state and local organizations, as well as members of Congress are urging Congress to reject this intrusion into states' authority to protect their public's health by banning dangerous pesticides. It remains to be seen if industry or the people will win this one. But we do know one thing--people winning is what democracy should look like.



ENVIRONMENT

Natural Grass: Better for Our Climate and Health

Over the years, coaches, scientists, and public officials have come to us with concerns about artificial turf. These concerns include the climate impacts of producing the plastics to make the fields, the presence of toxic chemicals in the plastics, and an increased risk of injuries to those playing on these fields.

Now studies in Europe identify artificial turf as a significant source of microplastic pollution in sea surface and river waters. Microplastics are easily ingested, inhaled, and absorbed by

animals, humans, and even plants, and linked to heart attacks, cancer, endocrine disruption, immune system impairment, and negative reproductive effects.

PEER is continuing to work with public officials on artificial turf issues. To address the growing concerns with the use of these fields, we urge communities to always give preference to natural grass over artificial turf fields. It is better for our climate and our health.

SUPPORTING PEER

A Letter from a Donor: Giving to PEER as a Force Multiplier

We wanted to share with you one donor's deeply personal story – with her permission – about why she and her husband are supporting PEER.

We are grateful and appreciative of those of you who share your stories about why you choose to support PEER's work.

Please consider renewing your support today via the QR code below or at peer.org/donate/



How did I get started in a career in environmental public service? Totally by accident. So did my husband. I knew when I started that I would be committed to both, forever.

I have a strong sense of duty to make the world a better place, so the public sector was a natural fit. I love nature and possess an endless curiosity about the world. I became an environmental regulator of industry and contaminated sites. In my journey doing good and protecting the environment, I gained access to a world that few to none see anymore.

I spent more than 30 years examining just about every manufacturing process you can imagine, and many you can't (anything involving molten metal is my favorite). I have inhabited the infrastructure that is the very foundation of our civilization (Yes, even manholes).

Public service provided a view into the inner workings of our world most people are unaware of. The dissolving of knowledge, both institutional and societal, is resulting in a growing cognitive dissonance, causing humans to fail to appreciate the state we are in and what it takes to keep it all going. We are fragmenting. It is devastating to see the devaluing of the public sector, civil society, and our planet.

Recently, stage 4 metastatic cancer compelled me to retire from my life's work. What now? Be deliberate. I think deeply about my values and live them, every day, in everything I do. Be compassionate. I do what I can. It is not that great a sacrifice to walk, bike, take public transit, smile, be helpful, unplug from light pollution, forego meat, consider other perspectives, be present, choose less. You really need less than you think.

My husband and I see giving to PEER as a Force Multiplier. We are all fighting for our lives. "A force multiplier is a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment (JP 3-05.1)." PEER is a force for good. I want to multiply that.

*Stay human,
T.*


Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

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Rise of Authoritarianism (continued from page 1)

Throughout the country, we are also seeing a growing resentment to the way this administration is treating their fellow human beings, including federal workers.

Finally, we also know that people across the ideological spectrum are coming together to fight to protect the civil service and strengthen environmental protections, whether it is to minimize chemicals in our food, protect public lands and wildlife, or come up with solutions to minimize greenhouse gas pollutants and address climate change.

Old and New Tactics Needed

PEER's unique blend of protecting

public employees and fighting to advance environmental protections is made for this moment.

But we also know we need to adopt new strategies and tactics in the coming months and years if we are to succeed in our work. One such strategy is to make sure we fight harder to expose and fight the corruption that has led to the gutting of the civil service and open war on science and the environment.

Another strategy is to continue to build bridges across all ideological spectrums by listening to others and learning from them and working with them.

In these times, we are reminded of Rep. John Lewis' quote: "Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

To learn more about our response to the rise in authoritarianism and how it affects our work, please visit our recent webinar, *Environmental Protection, Public Employees and the Rise of Authoritarianism*.

The webinar can be viewed by visiting peer.org/webinar-environmental-protection-public-service-authoritarianism/ or scanning the QR code (right).

