

“We’re in the Clown Car to Crazy Town”

Dear __,

That is how one federal employee explained why he could not predict what would happen to the environmental program where he works in the coming months. While the impending Trump presidency shares some hallmarks of previous transitions under Reagan and George W. Bush, there are fundamental differences. So, while PEER has been to this rodeo before, we have not seen this set of crazy cowpokes.

One big difference is how capricious and changeable the Trump campaign and transition has been. One day he says human-induced climate change is a “hoax”; then, he says “I’m still open-minded. Nobody really knows.” Indeed.

Here is a good example of what we can expect. Trump’s transition “landing team” created quite a stir when it submitted a questionnaire to the Department of Energy asking for, among other things, a [list of employees or contractors](#) who “attended any Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon meetings” and any of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings in the last five years. The questions sparked an immediate firestorm of concern over possible [ideological purges of climate scientists](#).

Within days, the Trump transition walked it back, issuing an enigmatic statement that “The questionnaire was not authorized or part of our standard protocol. The person who sent it has been properly counseled.” Unpacking this curious [non-explanation](#), several things jump out:

- Who knew the Trump transition has a protocol? What is it – don’t get caught?
- Someone in the Trump camp clearly wanted to make a list but why is not explained. It is likely not a Christmas list.
- Even though Energy officials [refused to supply names](#), come January 21st there will be no further refusals.

As this episode illustrates, inside information will be critical in the coming months. Many questionable schemes will be blown up by prematurely exposing them. When pressed, Trump shows no hesitancy about dropping stances he had declared days or even hours earlier. There appears to be no consistent philosophic underpinnings to his positions. Coupled with the fact that he is assembling a team with little federal executive branch experience, we can expect – as we have already seen – numerous stops and starts, reversals and somersaults.

Moreover, Trump appointees with agendas anathematic to the agencies they are tapped to lead are vulnerable to disastrous overreach. As the EPA scandals under Reagan illustrated, zealots without patience or propriety usually produce [fiascos and scandal](#). Reagan had to bring in moderates to [clean up the damage](#).

As we enter the Trump era, this is some of work PEER expects to be doing and business should be brisk. Your support is [needed now more than ever](#).

Happy New Year & tighten your seat belt – it's going to be a wild ride.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director

P.S. 24 & Counting. As 2017 dawns, PEER will be entering its 24th year of operation. One thing we can promise, this year will [not be boring](#). Please keep following and [tell a friend](#) to tune in.

P.P.S. Searching for Moral Leadership. Rather than unalloyed celebration capping its centennial year, the National Park Service had a [brutal 2016](#). One particularly distressing aspect was the series of [sexual harassment scandals](#) erupting in parks across the country. Since this summer, the Park Service has said it intended to conduct an all-employee survey as a first step. Well, it just announced that questionnaire finally will be distributed on Monday, January 9th with replies due by February 14, 2017. That means it will be up to Donald Trump to assess the situation and decide how to move forward to [lessen sexual harassment](#) in the ranks. Oy vey.

P.P.P.S. Help us spread the word! Like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), and share and re-tweet all our breaking news about our work standing up for public service.