



E. SCOTT PRUITT
ADMINISTRATOR

December 4, 2017

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse:

Thank you for your letter of October 31, 2017, regarding presentations at a Narragansett Bay Estuary Program workshop. We understand your concerns about the cancellation of planned presentations by an EPA scientist, a research fellow, and a consultant at the October 23 State of Narragansett Bay and Its Watershed Report workshop.

Procedures have been put in place to prevent such an occurrence in the future. I have assured Office of Research and Development (“ORD”) political and career senior leadership that they have the authority to make decisions about event participation going forward. This has been communicated to all ORD staff throughout the country, and ORD will continue to conduct research outlined in our Strategic Research Action Plans reflecting Congressional appropriations. As always, ORD scientists are asked to speak directly to the science in their presentations, leaving policy statements to the relevant EPA programs. Additionally, I am committed to upholding EPA’s Scientific Integrity Policy, which ensures that the Agency’s scientific work is of the highest quality, is presented openly and with integrity, and is free from political interference.

In fact, at the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation Conference (“CERF”) 2017 24th Biennial Conference held in Providence, Rhode Island on November 5 – 9, all three scientists referenced in your letter (Autumn Oczkowski, an ORD scientist, Rose Martin, an EPA-affiliated research fellow, and Emily Shumchenia, who is a consultant to the EPA) participated, with Dr. Oczkowski chairing the CERF conference. In addition, several other ORD scientists presented at the conference, including Wayne Munns, the Director of the EPA Atlantic Ecology Division (“AED”) in Narragansett, Rhode Island, who provided an overview presentation of AED’s research. We would also add that Dr. Oczkowski was interviewed about her work at the EPA for the Living Lab Radio on WGBH Boston. The 15-minute segment aired on November 26 and 27.

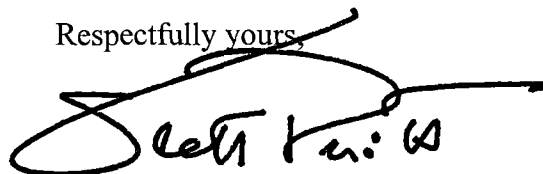


EPA will continue to contribute to the work of the NBEP (and other NEPs), the recommendations put forth in *The State of Narragansett Bay and Its Watershed*, and the broader protection and restoration of the Narragansett Bay as resources allow. EPA's overall research effort is closely aligned with the Agency's strategic goals and cross-agency strategies. Research is guided by Strategic Research Action Plans that are developed by EPA with input from its many internal and external partners and stakeholders. While there is no policy governing all aspects of attendance at scientific conferences, EPA employee participation in any scientific event is covered by the aforementioned Scientific Integrity Policy, which ensures the Agency's scientific work is of the highest quality, is presented openly and with integrity, and is free from political interference. In addition, on March 10, 2016, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of the Controller produced a Conference Spending Guide. This guide collects and explains many of the rules and procedures regarding conference spending. Both the Scientific Integrity Policy and the Conference Spending Guide are enclosed.

Regarding the *New York Times* report about officials from EPA headquarters visiting the lab in Rhode Island: On October 18 – 19, ORD Associate Director for Science Bruce Rodan, ORD Deputy Assistant Administrator for Research & Development Richard Yamada, and National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory ("NHEERL") Acting Director Wayne Cascio visited the NHEERL AED laboratory in Narragansett. (Dr. Rodan and Dr. Cascio are career EPA employees; Dr. Yamada is a political appointee.) The visit included tours of the lab facility, presentations from AED scientists about ongoing research, and meetings with AED management and staff, as well as state and local representatives from Rhode Island and Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Presentations included information on ORD's assistance to Rhode Island on detecting harmful algal blooms and how permeable reactive barriers can be used to remove excessive nitrogen from groundwater. Senior leadership from ORD (both career and political staff) routinely visit ORD's facilities outside of Washington, D.C. to interact with staff and see ongoing research firsthand.

Again, thank you for your letter. If you have further questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Troy Lyons in the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at (202) 564-4987 or Lyons.Troy@epa.gov.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Scott Pruitt", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

E. Scott Pruitt

cc: Senator John Barrasso, Chairman
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

Senator Tom Carper, Ranking Member
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee