

Anatomy of a Deep State

The EPA's 'Science Integrity Official' is plotting to undermine Trump's agenda.



Francesca Grifo testifying before Congress. PHOTO: SCIENCE DEMOCRATS/YOUTUBE



Kimberley A. Strassel, Wall St Journal, May 25, 2017 7:07 p.m. ET

[675 COMMENTS](#)

On May 8 a woman few Americans have heard of, working in a federal post that even fewer know exists, summoned a select group of 45 people to a June meeting in Washington. They were almost exclusively representatives of liberal activist groups. The invitation explained they were invited to develop “future plans for scientific integrity” at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Meet the deep state. That’s what conservatives call it now, though it goes by other names. The administrative state. The entrenched governing elite. Lois Lerner. The federal bureaucracy. Whatever the description, what’s pertinent to today’s Washington is that this cadre of federal employees, accountable to no one, is actively working from within to thwart Donald Trump’s agenda.

There are few better examples than the EPA post of Scientific Integrity Official. (Yes, that is an actual job title.) The position is a legacy of Barack Obama, who at his 2009 inaugural promised to “restore science to its rightful place”—his way of warning Republicans that there’d be no more debate on climate change or other liberal environmental priorities.

Team Obama directed federal agencies to implement “scientific integrity” policies. Most agencies tasked their senior leaders with overseeing these rules. But the EPA—always the overachiever—bragged that it alone had chosen to “hire a senior level employee” whose only job would be to “act as a champion for scientific integrity throughout the agency.

IN 2013 THE EPA HIRED FRANCESCA GRIFO, LONGTIME ACTIVIST AT THE FAR-LEFT UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS. MS. GRIFO HAD LONG COMPLAINED THAT EPA SCIENTISTS WERE “UNDER SIEGE”—ACCORDING TO [A REPORT](#) SHE HELPED WRITE—BY REPUBLICAN “POLITICAL APPOINTEES” AND “INDUSTRY LOBBYISTS” WHO

HAD “MANIPULATED” SCIENCE ON EVERYTHING FROM “MERCURY POLLUTION TO GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION TO CLIMATE SCIENCE.” AS SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY OFFICIAL, MS. GRIFO WOULD HAVE THE AWESOME POWER TO ROOT OUT ALL THESE MEDDLESOME SCIENCE DENIERS. A 2013 SCIENCE MAGAZINE STORY REPORTED SHE WOULD LEAD AN ENTIRE SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY COMMITTEE, WRITE AN ANNUAL REPORT DOCUMENTING SCIENCE “INCIDENTS” AT THE AGENCY, AND EVEN “INVESTIGATE” SCIENCE PROBLEMS—ALONGSIDE NO LESS THAN THE AGENCY’S INSPECTOR GENERAL.

And get this: “Her job is not a political appointment,” the Science article continues, “so it comes with civil service protections.” Here was a bureaucrat with the authority to define science and shut down those who disagreed, and she could not be easily fired, even under a new administration.

Ms. Grifo perhaps wasn’t too busy in the Obama years, since EPA scientists were given carte blanche to take over the economy. She seems to have been uninterested when EPA scientists used secret meetings and private email to collude with environmental groups—a practice somewhat lacking in scientific integrity.

She has been busier these past few months. In March the Sierra Club demanded that the EPA’s inspector general investigate whether the agency’s newly installed administrator, Scott Pruitt, had violated policy by suggesting carbon dioxide might not be the prime driver of global warming. The inspector general referred the matter to . . . the Scientific Integrity Official. So now an unelected, unappointed activist could pass judgment on whether the Senate-confirmed EPA chief is too unscientific to run his own agency. So much for elections.

There’s also that “scientific integrity” event planned for June. Of the 45 invitations, only one went to an organization ostensibly representing industry, the American Chemistry Council. A couple of academics got one. The rest? Earthjustice. Public Citizen. The Natural Resources Defense Council. Center for Progressive Reform. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Environmental Defense Fund. Three invites alone for the Union of Concerned Scientists. Anyone want to guess how the meeting will go?

This is a government employee using taxpayer funds to gather political activists on government grounds to plot—let’s not kid ourselves—ways to sabotage the Trump administration. Ms. Grifo did not respond to a request for comment.

Messrs. Pruitt and Trump should take the story as a hint of the fight they face to reform government. It’s hard enough to overcome a vast bureaucracy that ideologically opposes their efforts. But add to the challenge the powerful, formalized resistance of posts, all across the government, like the Scientific Integrity Official. Mr. Obama worked hard to embed his agenda within government to ensure its survival. Today it is the source of leaks, bogus whistleblower complaints, internal sabotage.

Pitched battle with these folks is no way to govern. The better answer is dramatic agency staff cuts—maybe start with the post of Scientific Integrity Official?—as well as greater care in hiring true

professionals for key bureaucratic posts. The sooner department heads recognize and take action against that deep state, the sooner this administration might begin to drain the swamp.

Write to kim@wsj.com.

Appeared in the May 26, 2017, print edition.