

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 27, 2018

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As members of the Safe Climate Caucus, we have been alarmed by the systematic effort by your administration over the past year to reduce access to climate change resources, science, and other information that had previously been accessible through federal government channels. We are concerned that several of the administration's actions violate the intent of the Federal Records Act.

A report released by the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI) in January of 2018 confirms that our concerns are warranted.<sup>1</sup> The report determined that multiple federal agency websites have been systematically altered to reduce mentions of climate change or obfuscate access to related informational resources. Further, recently released emails document that EPA administrator Scott Pruitt personally monitored efforts to remove climate change information from the agency's website,<sup>2</sup> demonstrating a controlled effort to censor climate change information. These actions are concerning not only because they downplay the serious threat that climate change poses to the future of our planet, but also because they impede access to important resources for the public to understand and address climate change.

Many of the significant reductions to climate-related information over the past year have occurred on the EPA's website. On April 28, 2017, the agency began a comprehensive website overhaul that included the removal of significant amounts of climate change-related information. One notable removal was the extensive "Student's Global Guide to Climate Change," an educational site for children.<sup>3</sup> Another was the EPA's website describing the potential benefits of the Clean Power Plan.<sup>4</sup> That website was replaced by a webpage about complying with Executive Order 13783 on Energy Independence. While some of the removed resources are archived in the historical January 19, 2017 snapshot of the EPA website, they are more difficult to access, and certain content, such as the "Student's Guide" and the site containing Spanish-language resources from the Clean Power Plan, were never stored in the snapshot at all. As a

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<sup>1</sup> (Changing the Digital Climate: How Climate Change Web Content is Being Censored Under the Trump Administration , 2018 )

<sup>2</sup> (Environmental Defense Fund, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> (Environmental Data and Governance Initiative , 2017 )

<sup>4</sup> (Rinberg & Bergman, How Pruitt Listens: Removing Clean Power Plan Web Resources Undermines Public Engagement, 2017)

result, some of these resources are no longer available anywhere on the EPA website, including within any EPA web archive.

Similarly, in late July of 2017, the EPA's "Climate and Energy Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments" website was replaced with a website titled "Energy Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments."<sup>5</sup> The new site excluded over 200 webpages from the original website, scrubbed all climate change references, and eliminated important resources for state, local, and tribal governments, including examples of state plans for climate adaptation.

Concerning changes have also been made to the Interior Department's website,<sup>6</sup> where the main climate change page was altered to remove a paragraph that warned: "climate change affects every corner of the American continent. It is making droughts drier and longer, floods more dangerous, and hurricanes more severe." Additionally, an extensive explanation of how the DOI's bureaus coordinate on climate change was removed, as well as links to information on the "Climate Change Response Council," "Eight DOI Climate Science Centers," and "A Network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives." Worse yet, the Bureau of Land Management's main climate change page was removed completely.<sup>7</sup>

While it is customary for federal agency websites to be updated at the beginning of a new administration, the past year's overhaul exemplifies what we view as a blatant attempt to obscure the proven connection between human activity and global climate change. These changes, combined with a widespread failure to archive the previous administration's climate resources in a way that makes them readily accessible to the public or accessible at all, fundamentally interfere with the American public's ability to access reliable information on this issue.

The Federal Records Act requires federal departments and agencies to collect, retain, and preserve their records. This provides Congress, the executive branch, and the public with a history of public-policy execution and its results. We are deeply concerned that the effort to suppress climate change information violates the intent of the Federal Records Act and undermines the democratic process by impeding access to information the public needs for the notice-and-comment rulemaking process. Notice-and-comment depends upon on a well-informed public with access to information including not just the costs, benefits, and potential effects of the regulation in question, but a thorough understanding of the agency's motivations for proposing or removing regulations.

Clear, unbiased communication of scientific and technological information regarding climate change, its causes, impacts, and solutions, is valuable information for state and local entities, as well as American families, as they seek to protect the health and safety of their communities. Therefore, we urge your Administration, when editing the content of web pages such as those mentioned above, to consider the fact that human-caused global climate change is one of the greatest existential threats to the future of our planet. This includes ensuring that relevant federal agency websites contain clear, prominently featured statements of the Administration's policies

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<sup>5</sup> (Rinberg, Bergman, & Nost, EPA's Website Overhaul Continues: Climate Resources Left Out of the Update to the "Climate and Energy Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments" Website, 2017)

<sup>6</sup> ( Anjur-Dietrich, Bergman, Gehrke, & Rinberg, 2017)

<sup>7</sup> (Bergman , Gehrke, Rinberg, & Schell , 2018)

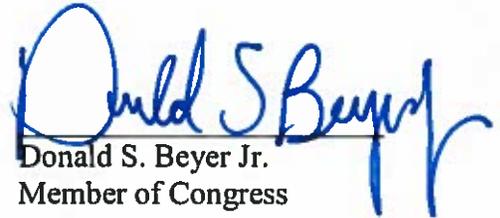
on this issue, and easily accessible links to archived climate information from past iterations of these web pages. Additionally, we suggest that in the future, federal agencies refrain from altering or reducing their web content before they have thoroughly documented their changes and ensured that the original content is made easily accessible through a public archive.

As a caucus, we believe that these suggestions will promote transparent, science-based climate policies that are readily accessible and help protect all Americans.

Sincerely,



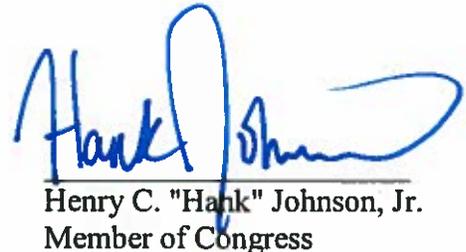
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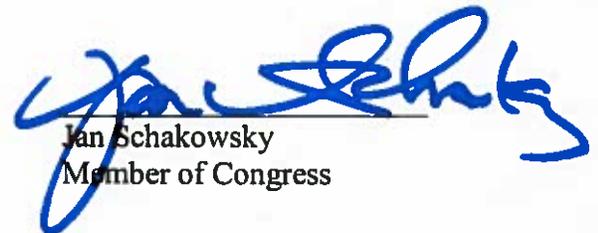
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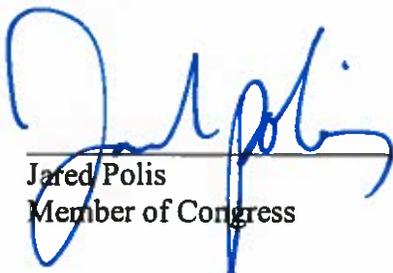
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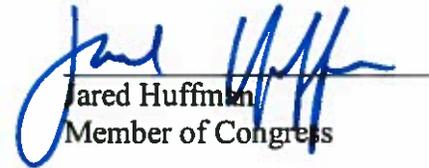
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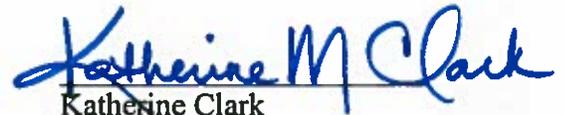
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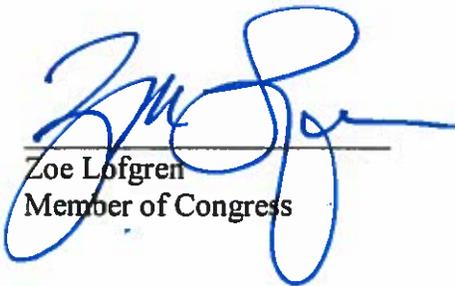
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