

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Board of Scientific Conformity

Time was when a newly elected American government could appoint its people to run it. These days that's a source of controversy, as Trump cabinet officials seek to name new science advisers.

Administrator Scott Pruitt is replacing half the members of the Environmental Protection Agency's Board of Scientific Counselors, and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has suspended some 200 science panels pending a review. To listen to the critics, they are "gutting" and "shutting down" federal science and "ousting" and "silencing" respected academics.

Ignore the hyperventilation. Mr. Pruitt is merely choosing not to renew some board members nearing the end of their first, three-year term. Nobody is getting fired, and board members can reapply. Past practice has been to hand scholars a second term, but Mr. Pruitt is under no obligation to accept Obama appointees. Mr. Zinke's review is temporary, and America will survive if the invasive species advisory panel misses a meeting.

Both actions are a step toward reforming a scientific bureaucracy that holds enormous power over regulations despite uniform points of view and clear conflicts of interest. The EPA's Board of Scientific Counselors, which is charged with ensuring that the agency's science is sound, nonetheless waded through the Obama Administration's dubious climate models and arbitrary "social cost of carbon" calculations.

The EPA's more than 20 scientific advisory boards are in particular stocked with academics who receive EPA grants. As part of a 2016 law-

suit, the Energy and Environment Legal Institute showed that 24 of the 26 members of EPA's then clean-air advisory panel had received or were receiving EPA grants. The institute estimated the 24 received \$190 million. At the EPA's ozone panel, 17 of 20 advisers received \$192 million in agency grants.

House Science, Space and Technology Chairman Lamar Smith has shown that advisers use these grants for research—and then sit on the government panels that peer review that research. They then review EPA rules based on their own research.

Greens are slamming Mr. Pruitt's office for suggesting he may consider industry experts for board positions, but why not? This was routine before greens intimidated Administrations into barring those voices. A rigorous science doesn't shrink from competing points of view or evidence. The EPA should have conflict-of-interest rules that apply equally to grant-receiving academics and business executives.

Mr. Zinke's review is aimed at ensuring that Interior's boards contain more state and local advisers, particularly from communities near public lands. This is part of the Trump Administration's broader goal of re-establishing a more balanced partnership between the federal government and the states—much-needed after the imperial dictates of the Obama years.

Messrs. Pruitt and Zinke could eliminate those boards that aren't required by statute. But if they're going to exist they should be more than rubber stamps for the progressive agenda or tickets for federal grants.

**Join an EPA
advisory panel and
get an EPA grant.**