

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20502

June 6, 2014

Mr. Hans Bader  
Senior Attorney  
Competitive Enterprise Institute  
1899 L Street, NW, 12<sup>th</sup> floor  
Washington, DC 20036

Re: Information Quality Act Request for Correction Regarding the Polar Vortex and Global Warming

Dear Mr. Bader:

Thank you for your Request for Correction regarding the polar vortex video<sup>1</sup> and certain statements on global warming that you have filed under the Office of Science and Technology Policy's (OSTP) Information Quality Guidelines.<sup>2</sup> OSTP received your request on April 14, 2014. Consistent with OSTP's Guidelines, we have posted your request on the OSTP website at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp/library/compliance/infoquality>.

Your letter requests that OSTP:

1. "immediately comply with the Information Quality Act by taking down the video entitled 'The Polar Vortex Explained in 2 Minutes';
2. "remov[e] from any OSTP products or publications the claim that more cold weather is coming because of global warming, or that the extreme cold experienced by much of the United States this winter is a pattern that we can expect to see with increasing frequency as global warming continues"; and
3. "remove the claim by Becky Fried that 'we also know that this week's cold spell is of a type there's reason to believe may become more frequent in a world that's getting warmer, on average, because of greenhouse-gas pollution.'"<sup>3</sup>

Your letter articulates the following reason for your request: that "the evidence (including the conclusions of peer-reviewed scholarly articles) indicates that the kind of extreme cold experienced in the United States this past winter is not linked to global warming," and that "Director Holdren's claim of 'a growing body of evidence' [that the extreme cold being experienced by much of the United States is a pattern that we can expect to see with increasing

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, "The Polar Vortex, Explained in Two Minutes," (January 8, 2014), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/share/polar-vortex-explained-two-minutes>.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Science and Technology Policy, Final Guidelines for Ensuring the Quality of Disseminated Information (October 1, 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/ostp-iqq.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Becky Fried, Office of Science and Technology Policy, "We the Geeks: 'Polar Vortex' and Extreme Weather," (January 8, 2014), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/01/08/we-geeks-polar-vortex-and-extreme-weather>.

frequency as global warming continues] is contradicted by recent peer-reviewed studies.” This letter responds to your request and addresses the concerns articulated in your letter.

The transcript of Dr. Holdren’s remarks in the polar vortex video, provided in Appendix A, makes clear that the video was intended to, and does, inform the viewer that (a) no single extreme-weather event, hot or cold, either proves or disproves global climate change; (b) climate-change dynamics are complex; (c) there is a plausible mechanism, linked to behavior of the polar vortex, by which a world that is warming on the average could include an increase in prolonged winter cold spells in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes; and (d) there is “a growing body of evidence” suggesting that this mechanism is indeed operating.

Dr. Holdren firmly stands by the integrity and accuracy of his statements in the polar vortex video. In the video, he made clear that “Computer models tell us that there are many different factors influencing these patterns and, as in all science, there will be continuing debate about exactly what is happening.” Robust debate and ongoing study are fundamental components of the scientific process, and do not restrict expression of current understanding and views. The polar vortex video did not claim to present a comprehensive review of the scientific literature in its two-minute run time. Nor was it a recitation of relevant scientific literature that failed to reference contradictory citations. Rather, it was an expression of Dr. Holdren’s personal opinion and expert judgment on the balance of the evidence. Dr. Holdren’s concluding statement in the video makes this clear: “I believe the odds are that we can expect, as a result of global warming, to see more of this pattern of extreme cold in the mid-latitudes and some extreme warm in the far north.” “I believe” is an expression of his expert judgment and personal opinion. Similarly, the blog post by Ms. Becky Fried expressed a viewpoint and opinion using language including “there’s reason to believe.”

You submitted your request for correction under the Information Quality Act. In 2002, OSTP issued Information Quality Guidelines to implement the Information Quality Act.<sup>4</sup> OSTP’s 2002 Guidelines, which are based on the Office of Management and Budget’s Government-wide Information Quality Guidelines,<sup>5</sup> state that opinions and policy positions are expressly excluded from the legal definition of “information,” and are not subject to OSTP’s Information Quality Act Guidelines. Accordingly, OSTP has determined that the Information Quality Act does not apply to the opinions stated by Dr. Holdren and Ms. Fried in the polar vortex video and blog post, respectively. On this legal basis, OSTP denies your request for information correction under the Information Quality Act.

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<sup>4</sup> “Information” is defined in OSTP’s Information Quality Act Guidelines as “any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data, in any medium or form, including textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative, or audiovisual forms. This definition includes information that OSTP disseminates from its web page.” The OSTP guidelines further explain, “This definition does not include: a) Opinions or policy positions, where the presentation makes clear that the statements are subjective opinions or policy recommendations, rather than facts.” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/ostp-iqg.pdf> .

<sup>5</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies; Republication,” 67 Fed. Reg. 8452 (Feb. 22, 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/fedreg/reproducible2.pdf>.

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may submit an Information Correction Appeal in writing within 30 days of the date of this letter. You may submit an appeal to OSTP General Counsel Rachael Leonard by email to [ostpinfo@ostp.gov](mailto:ostpinfo@ostp.gov) or via FAX to (202) 395-1224. The appeal should be clearly marked "Information Correction Appeal." Additional information on how to submit an Information Correction Appeal is available on OSTP's website at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp/library/compliance/infoquality>.

Sincerely,



Tamara Dickinson

Principal Assistant Director for  
Environment and Energy

## Appendix: Transcript of Polar Vortex Video

*If you've been hearing that extreme cold spells, like the one that we are having in the United States now, disproves global warming, don't believe it. The fact is that no single weather episode can either prove or disprove global climate change.*

*Climate is the pattern of weather that we observe geographically and over the seasons, and it is described in terms of averages, variations, and probabilities.*

*But a growing body of evidence suggests that the extreme cold being experienced by much of the United States as we speak is a pattern that we can expect to see with increasing frequency as global warming continues, and the reason is this: in the warming world that we're experiencing, the far north, the Arctic, is warming roughly twice as rapidly as the mid-latitudes, such as the United States. That means that the temperature differences between the Arctic and the mid-latitudes is shrinking, and that temperature difference is what drives what is called the circumpolar vortex, which is the great counter-clockwise swirling mass of cold air that hovers over the Arctic.*

*As the temperature difference between the Arctic and the mid-latitudes declines, the polar vortex weakens, and it becomes "wavier." The "waviness" means that there can be increased, larger excursions of cold air southward (that is, into the mid-latitudes), and, in the other phase of the wave, increased excursions of relatively warmer mid-latitude air into the far north.*

*Computer models tell us that there are many different factors influencing these patterns, and, as in all science, there will be continuing debate about exactly what is happening. But, I believe the odds are that we can expect, as a result of global warming, to see more of this pattern of extreme cold in the mid-latitudes and some extreme warm in the far north.*