

To: Wilcox, Jahan[wilcox.jahan@epa.gov]
Cc: Michael Cox [Ex. 6 - Personal Privacy]
From: Michael Cox
Sent: Wed 9/27/2017 7:34:31 PM
Subject: September 26th LA Times Article
February 24th 2017 email to EPA transition team.docx
March 13th 2017 email to EPA transition team.docx

I am writing in response to your comments that were included in an article by Evan Halper on September 26 in the Los Angeles Times (*Civil servants charge Trump is sidelining workers with expertise on climate change, environment*). In the article you are quoted as saying:

We have a great working relationship with career EPA employees," agency spokesman Jahan Wilcox wrote in an email. "In their own words, Mr. Cox said he was planning his retirement before the new administration and Ms. Southerland said she was retiring due to a family issue. Despite the faux outrage, both employees will receive their six-figure taxpayer-funded pension and we wish them the best."

I would like to provide a response to several of the statements made above.

"We have a great working relationship with career EPA employees"

I am sure you believe this is the case. However, career EPA employees who I talk with in the Regional offices, HQs, and the Labs do not share this belief. What I hear are employees who are not consulted on issues; learn about decisions via the press; and are demoralized because of the push by Administrator Pruitt to cut the EPA budget and staff. Of course you will dispute this, but I can only relate what I hear from friends and colleagues with whom I worked for several decades.

Also, please correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that Administrator Pruitt, since becoming Administrator, has not visited the EPA Regions or Labs to meet career EPA employees. The exceptions are random visits to Superfund sites or to Texas after hurricane Harvey. Please ask Administrator Pruitt to honor his commitment to listen and learn from EPA staff that he made during his first address to EPA staff.

"Despite the faux outrage, both employees will receive their six-figure taxpayer-funded pension and we wish them the best"

You state that both Ms. Southerland and I retired, which is true. What I do not understand is what you mean by the phrase "Despite the faux outrage". Faux of course meaning "fake" or fake outrage, which I assume means "untrue" or a more severe interpretation "lies". This interpretation is consistent with the use of "fake news" by other Administration officials to indicate something they do not agree with.

It is true that the criticism and comments I have made about the direction of EPA are my opinions. However, they are based on over 25 years of working at EPA and, in the case of Ms. Southerland, over 40 years. I would not characterize my opinions as “faux outrage”. If the feedback and support from career EPA employees that I received after my retirement is any gauge, I think I nailed it.

In terms of the “six-figure taxpayer-funded pension”, I am very mindful that my pension is paid for by tax payers. I am very thankful that we are lucky enough as Federal employees to have a pension when the majority of Americans are not so lucky. However, I take exception to the idea that I receive a six-figure pension (I guess if you count the numbers after the decimal point then yes I do have a seven-figure pension). In summary:

Total Gross Yearly Benefits including health benefits = \$48,991.68

Total Net Yearly Benefits (minus my share of health benefits and Federal Income Tax) = \$39,163.20.

I am certainly not complaining about the pension, but want you to understand that stating I have a six-figure pension is wrong and feeds into the false narrative of over-compensated Federal employees. If you would like to change the Federal employee pension system, I would suggest you lobby your Congressional representatives.

“...and we wish them the best”

I may be reading into the words, but this seems so disingenuous and insincere to wish Ms. Southerland and myself the best when you just called us liars and greedy.

Emails to EPA Beachhead Team Members

I am enclosing two emails I sent to Mr. Don Benton and Mr. Doug Erickson (members of the EPA Beach Head Team) when I worked at EPA. I provided them with some ideas on how Administrator Pruitt could work better with EPA staff. I think the comments are still relevant today.

Finally, I know there are bigger issues in the U.S. and the world than a few words in an article in the LA Times. However, I think the direction Administrator Pruitt is taking EPA is wrong, and in the end the people of the U.S. and the world will be the ones who are harmed. EPA is looked upon by the world as a shining example of how a country should do environmental protection and protect its citizens. I continue

to believe the majority of American citizens support the EPA. It saddens me to see the organization that I, and many of my friends and colleagues, have worked so hard to make into a great organization now being sacrificed on the altar of ideology. I know you have a tough job in defending, in many cases, the indefensible. But please, instead of dismissing any criticism of EPA outright, ask yourself and others around you that maybe this Administration is going too far in trying to reshape EPA and jeopardizing the health of the American people and protection of our valuable environmental resources.

Michael Cox