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Climate scientist sees cover-up

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A NASA scientist who said the Bush administration muzzled him because of his belief in global warming yesterday acknowledged to Congress that he'd done more than 1,400 on-the-job interviews in recent years.

James Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, who argues global warming could be catastrophic, said NASA staffers denied his request to do a National Public Radio interview because they didn't want his message to get out.

But Republicans told him the hundreds of other interviews he did belie his broad claim he was being silenced.

"We have over 1,400 opportunities that you've availed yourself to, and yet you call it, you know, being stifled," said Rep. Darrell Issa, California Republican.

Mr. Hansen responded: "For the sake of the taxpayers, they should be availed of my expertise. I shouldn't be required to parrot some company line."

In a bitter hearing before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, which is investigating whether there was political interference into climate science, Republicans and Democrats accused each other of "smearing" the other's witnesses.

High-profile global warming hearings this week will include appearances by former Vice President Al Gore before House and Senate committees.

Mr. Hansen yesterday said the Bush administration threatened him and his office over his stance on global warming.

"It was an oral threat made to a public affairs person in New York and relayed to me," said Mr. Hansen, who is listed as a senior adviser to Mr. Gore and consulted on Mr. Gore's global warming film, "An Inconvenient Truth."

Citing what he called a "growth of political interference," Mr. Hansen said he was forced by NASA officials to deny an interview request from NPR because press officials believed the network to have a liberal bias.

But Mr. Issa noted that Mr. Hansen conducted 15 interviews in the month after accusing the Bush administration of censorship.

During the hearing, former NASA spokesman George Deutsch said he made an error in judgment by sending an e-mail to his superiors suggesting that several of Mr. Hansen's colleagues should grant the NPR interview instead of him.

Mr. Deutsch, who was 23 at the time, said Mr. Hansen was prohibited from doing the interview because of his prior refusal to notify NASA officials when he was granting



interviews, not for political reasons.

Citing what he called his "constitutional right" to give interviews, Mr. Hansen admitted violating NASA's press policy but defended his actions.

"It's a very rare case of where you got it on paper," Mr. Hansen said of Mr. Deutsch's e-mail, claiming the blocked interview was not an exception. "This thing was going on all the time."

Mr. Hansen refused to denounce earlier comments he made referring to the White House as a "propaganda office," and saying, "It seems more like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union than the United States."

"I was referring to the constraints of speaking to the media," Mr. Hansen said, when asked about his comments.

Mr. Hansen also claimed his department was put on a "going out of business budget," by the White House as payback from his global warming views and that press releases were routinely sent to the White House for approval before going public.

Republicans questioned him about his ties to prominent Democrats.

Mr. Hansen received a \$250,000 grant from the Heinz foundation, which is controlled by Teresa Heinz Kerry, wife of Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat. Mr. Hansen was a vocal supporter of Mr. Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign.

"As far as I know, there's no political connection to this award," said Mr. Hansen, who has donated several thousand dollars to past presidential campaigns for Mr. Kerry and Mr. Gore. "It's an environmental award."

Chairman Henry A. Waxman, California Democrat, accused Republicans of "smearing" the witness after Rep. Mark Souder, Indiana Republican, asked Mr. Hansen about the Heinz foundation grant.

In response, Republicans accused Democrats on the committee of unfairly criticizing Philip Cooney, former chief of staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Mr. Cooney said he and several other administration colleagues were responsible for editing documents that were produced by scientists including Mr. Hansen.

Mr. Cooney, who was previously employed by the Petroleum Institute, which lobbies on behalf of the gas and oil industries, denied that any of his changes were designed to conceal scientific research on global warming.

For his part, Mr. Hansen explained that he has not always disagreed with the administration's environmental positions, offering approval for increased research into nuclear power and praising the White House's support for a methane gas program.

"It is a success story, and the administration should be given credit for it," Mr. Hansen said.

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