

May 22, 2018

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Administrator:

I am writing regarding the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) disturbing treatment of journalists under your leadership.

Concerns have been mounting for many months that the EPA is refusing to do the public's business in public. Many official policy announcements are held behind closed doors, with only "friendly" media members invited, such as your recent announcement to rollback automobile emissions standards. Local reporters are kept in the dark when you travel to communities facing environmental challenges around the country. However, the treatment of journalists at today's official EPA "Leadership Summit" regarding drinking water contamination by two toxic substances reached a new low.

The Associated Press reports that EPA barred its journalist and those of other respected media organizations from this meeting at EPA headquarters. CNN has issued a statement that its journalists were selectively excluded from the event. Politico reported that a small group of reporters, including its own, were permitted for the opening remarks but then escorted from the meeting by EPA personnel. In the most disturbing part, the AP reported that:

Guards barred an AP reporter from passing through a security checkpoint inside the building. When the reporter asked to speak to an EPA public-affairs person, the security guards grabbed the reporter by the shoulders and shoved her forcibly out of the EPA building.

This intimidation of journalists seeking to cover a federal official presiding over important policy-making is un-American and unacceptable.

This meeting was announced publicly via a news release on EPA's website and featured remarks by at least two other high ranking federal officials in addition to Administrator Pruitt. According to EPA's release, this meeting kicks off a wide-ranging community and stakeholder engagement process in which the public has a great interest—protecting its drinking water from toxic chemicals. Clean drinking water is a public health issue that does not belong behind closed doors.

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This is not the first time that I have had to write to a federal agency during the Trump Administration when they used physical tactics to avoid journalists' questioning. Last year, the FCC's security personnel manhandled a CQ reporter seeking to question an FCC Commissioner. FCC Chairman Pai later said "[t]he physical contact between one of the Commission's security officers and Mr. Donnelly should not have occurred." I understand that EPA reversed this exclusion of the media for the afternoon session and staff has apologized to the AP journalist, but more needs to be done.

As the leader of EPA, I urge you to take the following actions in response to today's events:

1. Publicly explain and apologize to the excluded media organizations, particularly the AP journalist who was grabbed and shoved.
2. Direct EPA staff to allow unbiased press access to EPA events and announcements in the future to ensure information that belongs to the public can get to the public.
3. Release detailed public schedules of your activities on a real time basis, as done by your predecessor and other Trump Administration cabinet officials.

Refusal to take these steps will only reveal a continued commitment to place your own personal agenda and comfort above the public interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Udall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T".

Tom Udall

United States Senator