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September 12, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

I write to express serious concerns about a recent public response issued by the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Public Affairs that personally attacked a journalist covering your agency.

While disagreements between journalists and public affairs professionals are routine, the EPA's September 3, 2017 public statement personally attacking the Associated Press' Michael Biesecker represented an inappropriate use of taxpayer resources to castigate our free press for simply doing its job.

Moreover, I am concerned that the EPA's response to the Associated Press' September 2, 2017 story muddled key information, presented an incomplete picture, and created a misleading impression for the American people. Specifically:

- The EPA's response stated that "through aerial imaging, EPA has already conducted initial assessments at 41 Superfund sites – 28 of those sites show no damage, and 13 have experienced flooding." However, the response did not mention that the EPA had not physically visited all of the Superfund sites in the Houston area because they were not accessible by response personnel.
- The EPA's response stated "EPA and state agencies worked with responsible parties to secure Superfund sites before the hurricane hit." However, the response made no mention of flooding at the sites that had ostensibly been secured by the EPA.

- The EPA's response accused Mr. Biesecker by name of "reporting from the comfort of Washington." However, the response did not mention that Mr. Biesecker's co-author was able to use a boat to document the condition of one flooded Houston-area Superfund site and accessed others with a vehicle or on foot.

It should go without saying that obscuring facts to mislead the public and unleashing ad hominem attacks on journalists is unacceptable conduct on the part of a federal agency.

In the future, I hope you and your colleagues will act in a more professional manner and refrain from such unacceptable personal attacks.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

cc:

Ms. Liz Bowman
Associate Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20460