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Walker's War on Science: A Stepped Plan By Senator Mark Miller

Wisconsin has long been a national leader in environmental protection. As we enter year seven of the Walker administration and Republican control over state government, that legacy has vanished. Today, Wisconsin competes for national leadership in removing environmental protections and degrading science-based decision making.

The Department of Natural Resources recently removed the truth about the human impacts on global warming from their website and replaced it with the language used by climate change deniers. The White House website went under a similar change when President Trump took office.

There is no scientific debate as to the cause of climate change. The absolutely clear scientific consensus is that man is affecting the climate and doing so through the continued burning of fossil fuels and emission of greenhouse gases. There is no doubt about what the impacts will mean for the future of our environment and our children and grandchildren if global warming continues at its current pace. We are experiencing those impacts today with rising sea levels and catastrophic weather events. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and its scientists know this. The Walker administration finds this truth, as Al Gore might say, "inconvenient." Their response? Erase reality, inserting instead language that fits their distorted view, unsupported by science.

Department of Natural Resources Secretary Cathy Stepp is a major implementer of Governor Walker's assault on science. Since taking over in 2011, the Department has retreated from its obligation to accurately inform the public and the Legislature about the impacts of environmental policy changes. I have served on the Natural Resources legislative committees for 16 years. The DNR plays a critical role in helping craft policy solutions to environmental problems. It is essential for legislators and the public to understand the impact of new laws on air and water quality and on the health of our people. Formerly, the DNR provided that insight and advice. Today, that role is nonexistent, a direction of current leadership.

In the last budget, the Governor and Legislative Republicans stripped the DNR of science and education employees in dual effort to silence not only scientists but those at the department who share their findings. Last summer, Republican Attorney General Brad Schimel suggested in an opinion that the DNR defy judicial rulings when considering the impacts high capacity wells have on public waters. Governor Walker and Secretary Stepp, under no obligation to do so, took that opinion and ordered their staff to issue high capacity well permits without critical review, ignoring the DNR's constitutional obligation to protect the waters of the state for all people, not a chosen few in favored industries. That follows a similar pattern to the infamous mining legislation, sold to Gogebic Taconite for in exchange campaign donations. The Environmental Protection Agency is currently investigating the DNR for failure to address 75 issues of concern. A recent audit conducted by the Legislative Audit Bureau showed the DNR is failing its obligation to inspect and enforce water pollution permits.

The Walker Administration, Secretary Stepp and President Trump are perpetrating fraud on the people of Wisconsin. By continuing to degrade and deny science, they are subjecting Wisconsin's air, water and land to long term damage while hiding behind the cover of being "open for business." As Gaylord Nelson famously said, "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around." In Walker's Wisconsin and Trump's America, everything is the other way around.