



News

Crossing the Line

Analyzing EPA news releases under Trump and ensuring trust in federal information in the future



EDGI

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Authors:

Alejandro Paz, Gretchen Gehrke, Marcy Beck, R. Michelle Warrix, Aaron Lemelin, EDGI

December 2021



The [Environmental Data & Governance Initiative](#) (EDGI) is a North American network with members from numerous academic institutions and nonprofit or grassroots organizations, as well as caring and committed volunteers and employees who come from a broad spectrum of work and life backgrounds. EDGI promotes open and accessible government data and information along with evidence-based policymaking.



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Executive Summary

Press releases, referred to as news releases by the EPA and throughout this report, have served as a tool for public entities to inform the media and public for more than a century. News releases are one of the primary ways federal agencies communicate with the public. What information to share and how to frame it are subjective and even political choices, and because of this, news releases are particularly susceptible to crossing the line from informing the public to promoting partisan political agendas at odds with scientific evidence, existing policies, or an agency's mission. This report uses the term "politicized" as shorthand to refer to cases that cross this line.

Websites are the [primary means of federal agency communication to the public](#). With the availability of powerful internet search functions and with dedicated subdomains on agency websites, news releases today are not the ephemeral messages they used to be. Once one-time missives, news releases now constitute an enduring body of information that the public can access and utilize at will through agency websites. However, guidance to agencies regarding the content of their news releases remains scant.

EDGI's Website Monitoring Team has documented and analyzed changes to federal agency websites since January 2017 and has [identified key gaps](#) in information policies that facilitated problematic information management under the Trump administration. News releases comprise a unique subset of agency website information, with different origins, intentions, and posting and archive schedules than other parts of agency websites. In this report, the EDGI Website Monitoring Team analyzes patterns in EPA news releases between January 20, 2017, and January 19, 2021, in order to understand how to, 1) better protect the integrity of information released by agency press offices and 2) mitigate politicization in the future.

During the Trump administration, about 4% of EPA news releases were politicized in overt and alarming ways. We observed four themes of highly politicized EPA news releases during the Trump administration. Highly politicized news releases frequently (35%) utilized partisan testimonials to build an image of broad support for the agency's deregulatory agenda. News releases also often (10%) used notably hostile and insulting language toward mainstream journalists, government officials, and former administrations. Many news releases (34%) also promoted a distortion of reality, or spin, by selective inclusion of information and context relevant to the topic of the news release, usually in order to embellish the administration's environmental record or omit environmental impacts of its

deregulatory agenda. This practice was particularly notable in news releases from the summer and fall of 2020 which reported on events held by Administrator Andrew Wheeler in support of President Trump and the Trump administration. Finally, one of the most frequent (33%) and striking themes of politicized EPA news releases was the re-publishing of articles favorable to the administration or opinion pieces penned by EPA officials and published in various private news media channels. This practice calls into question the basic premise of what a news release is by using federal agency resources to intermingle with the interests of privately owned news media companies. Each of these themes raises questions about what can be or should be considered newsworthy, what information is appropriate to include , and what tone is acceptable.

Unfortunately, these are not straightforward matters to address. Missives that are intended to shape public opinion, such as agency news releases, are extremely challenging to regulate. Currently, agency news releases are not subject to rules that ensure government agencies disseminate accurate information under the Information Quality Act (IQA), and any regulation of such short, frequent, and highly subjective missives would require a high level of complexity. Even without the short timeline of most news release development and dissemination, articulating boundaries of acceptable communication and position promotion versus propaganda or other unacceptable communications is onerous. The Congressional Research Service examined this challenge in the 2005 report "[Public Relations and Propaganda: Restrictions on Executive Agency Activities](#)" which outlined the challenges inherent in defining propaganda, let alone regulating it.

Based on our analysis, we recommend six basic news release guidelines to spur conversations about how to effectively protect the integrity of public information disseminated by federal agencies. We recommend that federal agency news releases:

- convey professionalism through tone and subject matter,
- establish and maintain higher standards for newsworthiness,
- publish accurate information,
- are archived and accessible,
- do not promote private news interests,
- do not serve as vehicles for campaigning.

By offering these basic recommendations, we hope to generate conversations about how federal agencies can better steward information disseminated via their websites to ensure its trustworthiness and, in turn, engender public trust.

Introduction

The explicit purpose of press or news releases is to inform the press, and in turn the public, about newsworthy events. In practice, these have always been used to not only inform, but also to shape public opinion about those events. The first press release was issued in 1906 after a terrible train accident that killed more than 50 people. Before any reporters had published articles about the accident, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company released a statement to the press describing what had transpired, from the railroad company's perspective ([Rampton, 2016](#)).

In 1905, one year before writing the first press release, Ivy Lee authored a declaration of press office principles that became widely adopted in the public relations arena ([Russell and Bishop, 2009](#)):

All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact. Upon inquiry, full information will be given to any editor concerning those on whose behalf an article is sent out. In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about.

In addition to these basic public relations principles Lee identified, there is an extra layer of accountability expected from government press offices. This has been readily acknowledged by the federal government, for example, in the Office of Management and Budget's guidance Circular A-130, "[Managing Information as a Strategic Resource](#)," which includes under "Basic Considerations" that, "The free flow of information between the Government and the public is essential to a democratic society" and "Government agencies shall be open, transparent, and accountable to the public."

The provision of accurate information to the public by federal agencies is essential for the public to be able to exercise oversight, hold agencies accountable to democratically expressed public will, and utilize the tools of democracy to change the course of our

federal institutions. However, the choice of what information is shared by agencies is inherently subjective. Irrespective of the framing or content within a news release, even the decision to create a news release about a given topic can easily become a political endeavor, and agencies' delivery of information has political influences. This vulnerability to political influences that distort reality underscores questions about the need for standards regarding what is considered newsworthy along with baseline information requirements for agency news releases.

The flow of information from the government to the public is mediated by web communications in the 21st century (e.g. [OMB Circular A-130](#)). While "e-government"—government use of technology to provide public services, such as information provision—has not infused democratic participation in governance as much as might have been expected (e.g. [Chadwick and May, 2003](#)), the Office of Management and Budget has recognized that [agency websites are the primary means by which agencies interact with the public](#). Agency news releases are aggregated on agency websites and are as easily discovered as other agency web content. The more enduring presence of news releases has in practice fundamentally changed their nature from a singular missive to a repeated resource that can be accessed, interpreted, and used or misused by the public.

Guidance exists for federal government public relations and public information infrastructure, but it offers very little recourse for false or misleading information. Circular A-130 asserts as a basic consideration that agencies should work to "maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of Federal information." This is merely guidance, however, that is aimed at federal information as a whole and does not expressly address the role of agency news releases in disseminating that information. Moreover, as is described later, agency press or news releases are not subject to the provisions of the [Information Quality Act \(IQA; PL 106-554 § 515\)](#), which actually requires information to be accurate and provides an avenue to challenge the veracity of information provided by the federal government. With press releases explicitly outside the scope of the IQA, and with no other binding requirements for their accuracy, agency news releases can easily be used to manipulate information to create a favorable image of an agency or its actions.

Related to information quality, there are no binding rules regarding the tone or professionalism of news releases. The EPA's [very first press release](#) set a tone of professionalism that carried through to news releases regarding even very contentious topics, like the decision to [ban the pesticide DDT](#). More recently, this high level of professionalism has been evident in news releases such as one describing the Biden

administration's decision to [rescind a Trump administration executive order regarding EPA guidance documents](#). However, during the Trump administration there were notable exceptions, where news releases were delivered with unprofessional and combative tones. For example, one [2020 news release](#) began with the sentence "Today, *The New York Times* continued its march to irrelevance through extreme bias, launching an interactive hit list on the Trump Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)." This mirrored a multitude of unprofessional communications coming from the Trump White House, along with a pattern of selective information and "[alternative facts](#)."

The unique vulnerability of news releases to political manipulation, coupled with the Trump administration's patterns of promoting misinformation and pressing overtly partisan storylines, spurred EDGI's Website Monitoring Team to analyze the content and language of EPA news releases between January 20, 2017, and January 19, 2021. The Team has been documenting and analyzing changes to the federal presentation of and provision of public access to environmental information through agency websites since January 2017. Examining federal agency website changes by the Trump administration exposed information policy gaps and vulnerabilities and EDGI [developed recommendations](#) to improve federal information policies. News releases had not previously been considered in the body of evidence or recommendations EDGI developed. The findings of this study now enable us to consider what measures or standards might be applied to prevent such overt politicization of news releases from occurring again.

Managing, much less regulating, federal agency information dissemination through news releases is inherently challenging due to the subjective nature of what to highlight and how. The federal government has encountered similarly sticky subject matter before, for example in 2005 when members of Congress introduced a bill to stop government propaganda ([S. 266 -- 109th Congress](#)). To assist in congressional deliberation, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) detailed three challenges for "any effort to reform current statutory restrictions on agency public relations activities" ([CRS, 2005](#)). A key challenge described there that is a pivotal issue for news releases is that of defining "propaganda." Many, if not most, communications by administrations are an effort to shape public opinion, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has "traditionally afforded agencies wide discretion in their informational activities" to share agency views and positions. There are prohibitions on "self-aggrandizement" and grassroots lobbying, [which the EPA violated in 2014](#), but promoting an agency position without legislative implications is permissible. Public opinion can be shaped even through purely factual reporting by the completeness of the information delivered, including the contextual

information provided, which makes it challenging to delineate standards of information provision for a given dissemination. This is particularly challenging because the impacts of varying degrees of information completeness are almost entirely dependent upon the audience.

We acknowledge these challenges to the development and enforcement of rules meant to protect the integrity of federal public information. The recommendations we present are preliminary, largely centered on raising key questions and policy considerations rather than identifying direct, actionable steps for agencies to take or which offices or branches of the government bear the responsibility for oversight or implementation. We hope our recommendations spark conversations and first steps towards improving and expanding information policies to encompass federal agency news releases.

The regulation of government information and news releases

Numerous laws, regulations, and guidelines affect the creation and dissemination of government information, including news releases. The IQA, passed by Congress in 2000 as part of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, is perhaps the most relevant law on this subject. However, its effect on news releases is not always clear. The [IQA requires](#) the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish guidelines for “ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies.” Federal agencies are subsequently required to establish their own guidelines for disseminated information in accordance with OMB.

In 2002, OMB released their [IQA Guidelines](#) as required by law. The guidelines established basic-level standards for data quality, while recognizing that some disseminated information should meet a higher-level than it set out in its guidelines. The guidelines however do not cover news releases, stating that “dissemination” [does not include](#) “distribution limited to correspondence with individuals or persons, press releases, archival records, public filings, subpoenas, or adjudicative processes.” The regulatory reasoning behind this definition of “dissemination” is beyond the scope of this analysis, but the consequences of this exclusion are significant. The Biden administration directed the OMB to “review whether guidance to agencies on implementation of the Information Quality Act needs to be updated and reissued” in its [January 27 Memorandum on Scientific Integrity](#), which could result in new IQA Guidelines that affect the content of news releases in the coming years.

In its guidelines, EPA [narrowed](#) OMB's news release exclusion to provide that the agency should have already disseminated the information discussed in the news release in some other way (see pages 16-17). The guidelines treat this information as being "of an ephemeral nature." For example, if a press release covering the contents of a technical assessment does not provide any new information that isn't present in the assessment, the agency's information quality guidelines would not be applicable since the technical assessment already presumably follows those guidelines. In support of EPA's guidelines, a preliminary review of the draft agency guidelines from OIRA in 2002 found that EPA's "[limitation avoids creating an incentive to misuse press releases to circumvent information quality standards.](#)" EPA states in its guidelines it has other policies and review processes that oversee the quality of the information it distributes, including information not covered under its information quality guidelines (page 18). However, as seen in the various examples covered in this report, many types of news releases cover an array of information that challenges the framing made in these guidelines. This report aims to shed light on these examples and raise questions about how to better ensure the integrity of information in news releases is protected.

Methods

EDGI's analysts reviewed each news release from January 20, 2017, through January 19, 2021, listed in the "EPA Newsroom" web page under the listing for [all news releases](#). At the time, news releases dating back to the first day of the Trump administration were included; now news releases dating before 2019 are located in [the archive](#).

The vast majority of EPA news releases during this time were announcements of grants and superfund site clean ups, originating from regional EPA offices. There were relatively few news releases that originated from agency headquarters or other central offices, and very few news releases regarding other agency activities or actions, such as agency research, proposed regulations, data regarding the effectiveness of various regulations, etc.

All news releases were skimmed for content and tone. Content was reviewed more closely if the news release had one of the following characteristics:

- aggressive or adversarial tones,
- laudatory or obsequious tones,
- accolades ascribed to political appointees or President Trump rather than to the agency,
- explicitly and implicitly promoting EPA's deregulatory agenda

News releases that exhibited one or more of these characteristics were read for specific political and/or partisan agendas. We found approximately 4% of EPA news releases exhibited these characteristics and were overtly politicized. Concurrent with the identification of overtly politicized news releases, news releases were inductively themed. The results of inductive theming are presented in the following section.

Analysis of EPA news releases during Trump administration

Through inductive theming of news releases with the characteristics listed in the Methods section, our team identified four primary themes of politicization: (1) using testimonials from industry and partisan officials to promote a deregulatory agenda; (2) using adversarial, hostile language toward selected members of the press and government officials; (3) promoting spin through manipulation or selective inclusion of facts, as well as the aggrandizement of the administration; and (4) re-publishing opinion pieces and other articles favorable to the agency’s actions that had been published by private news sources. The following table lists themes and their frequencies in our sample. News releases were categorized with multiple themes when appropriate.

Theme	Count (percentage of sample)
Using testimonials to promote a deregulatory agenda	71 (35%)
Using adversarial, hostile language	21 (10%)
Promoting spin	69 (34%)
Posting articles already published in the press	66 (33%)

1. Using testimonials to promote a deregulatory agenda

A frequent method the Trump administration used to politicize news releases was through the use of testimonials, which accounted for 35% of our sample. EPA news releases regularly featured testimony from Republican elected officials and industry advocates that promoted the agency’s deregulatory actions. The frequent use of such testimonials undermined Ivy Lee’s press office principles in at least two ways: it served the political interests of Trump administration appointees through advertisement and it also created

the image of partisanship in the agency press office, potentially undermining the public's trust in it.

A recurring type of news release from EPA's Press Office, titled "What they are saying," was a staple of the Trump presidency from its beginning and accounted for 18% of our sample. These news releases praised the administration and agency leadership and were usually co-released with other press releases covering the same subject. The "What they are saying" news releases included either no introduction or a one-sentence introduction to the general topic, followed by short paragraphs of quotations from Republican state and industry leaders affirming recent EPA decisions. These news releases did not provide background information or other explanatory text, but were lists of praise from a narrow set of stakeholders. The "What they are saying" style of news release was unique to the Trump administration: It had not been used by the Obama administration, and there has not been an example of it yet, nearly a year into the Biden administration.

The [first](#) of the Trump administration's "What they are saying" news releases, published on February 18, 2017, the day after the new Administrator's senate confirmation, began with the standalone sentence "Positive comments keep rolling in for new EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt," a framing which encapsulated the perceived purpose of these news releases. This news release quoted industry leaders and Republican representatives who spoke to the desire and potential for scaling back federal regulations in favor of local control and economic growth. Another "What they are saying" [news release](#) covered reactions to a 2018 [House Energy And Commerce hearing](#) on the EPA. The selection of comments included in this news release from elected Republican representatives and Administrator Pruitt defended Pruitt from criticism he received during the hearing. None of the quotations presented in the news release relate to content from the hearing. The news release did include a link at the top of the webpage to a Wall Street Journal article titled "Pruitt Says Attacks Are Driven By Opposition To Trump." A 2018 [news release](#) on the [Affordable Clean Energy Rule](#) quoted elected Republicans, trade association leaders, the head of a libertarian think tank, and one former Democratic elected official praising the new rule and the repeal of the Clean Power Plan. One of these quotations emphasized the importance of confirming eventual Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh to counter expected litigation from environmentalists. Not all news releases of this variety, however, include quotations exclusively from conservative and industry-aligned parties. For example, a June 2017 [news release](#) about Susan Bodine's nomination as Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance included significant praise from officials who had served in both

Republican and Democratic administrations, and was not included in this analysis of overtly politicized news releases.

What They Are Saying About President Trump's Executive Order on Energy Independence



“With today’s executive order President Trump has honored his pledge to stand with energy consumers and Ohio coal country over radical environmentalists. Mr. Obama’s alleged “Clean Power Plan” would’ve done virtually zero to protect the environment while at the same time destroying thousands of jobs and costing families billions of dollars for decades to come. It’s a much brighter future for the coal industry as this administration continues to systematically end the war on coal.”

- **Ohio Coal Association -- President Trump Dismantles Job Killing “Clean Power Plan”**

Figure 1. Example snapshot of a “What They Are Saying” EPA news release, published on March 30, 2017.

These news releases were emblematic of an administration obsessed with bolstering its public image. They presented a disturbing pattern where the Press Office’s assignment to inform the public about its actions was pushed to the point where the focus became more on what others thought of the agency than what the agency itself was doing. The use of the EPA Press Office to publish a series of unnecessary news releases promoting deregulation is consistent with other patterns detailed in this report, including the reposting of favorable outside news coverage through news releases.

2. Using adversarial, hostile language

One of the patterns that emerged from EDGI’s analysis was the use of overt hostility in news releases about people and sectors the Trump EPA may have regarded as threats to its deregulatory agenda. In these news releases, the EPA criticized and questioned the motives of media organizations, government officials, and officials who served during the Obama administration. These news releases characterized by hostile tones accounted for 10% of our sample.

A. Hostility towards the press

The Trump administration’s relationship with the media was generally hostile, which was evident in White House press briefings and outputs such as EPA news releases. In May

2018, [Vox reported](#) how the Trump EPA barred reporters from certain outlets from its PFAS National Leadership Summit, and [Inside Climate News similarly covered](#) how political appointees and EPA Press Office staff attacked the professionalism of reporters that had written articles critical of the agency. The EPA Press Office used news releases to try to undermine the work of media outlets who criticized its actions, such as a [2019 news release](#) that asserted E&E News “refus[ed] to include answers that d[id]n’t fit their anti-Trump narrative” and a [2020 news release](#) (see Figure 2) that parodied the New York Times’ “all the news that’s fit to print” slogan.

EPA news releases during the Trump administration denigrated or rebuked articles by [The New York Times](#), [Associated Press](#), [The Hill](#), [Politico](#), and [Huffington Post](#), [E&E News](#), as well as a letter from the [Society of Environmental Journalists](#). The news releases mostly claimed journalists provided misleading information, including describing E&E News information as “hogwash.” However, the EPA news releases that objected to these articles did not provide the full text of the quotes or statements in question and generally provided very little, if any, background information. For example, in the [2019 news release](#) “Politico Misleads On Trump EPA’s Progress Cleaning Up Superfund Sites,” there are neither quotes nor references to any Politico article or journalist; there is not even a title or date provided for whatever objectionable article may have been written. Likewise, in the [2020 news release](#) “Associated Press Wants You to Believe the Trump Administration Ignores America’s Most Contaminated Sites,” the news release explains “Here’s what AP conveniently left out of their story,” but did not include a title, date, quotes, or other information from the article itself.

At times, these EPA news releases obfuscated the original reporting from news outlets in order to dispute the validity of statements without engaging with what was originally written. For example, in response to a [CNN](#) article, a [2018 news release](#) (without providing a link to the original CNN article) alleged several falsehoods, including objecting to a sentence stating that a [new guidance memo](#) on Clean Air Act requirements “is the latest move by the Trump administration to loosen restrictions surrounding air pollution.” The EPA news release appeared to counter that statement with information demonstrating “dramatic improvement in air quality” over the last several years, however, that wasn’t the focus of the original statement.



Figure 2. Example snapshot of an EPA news release that includes hostility toward the press, published on January 14, 2020.

B. Hostility towards government officials

EPA Press Office news releases also displayed hostility towards Democratic Party elected officials. For example, [a 2020 news release](#) questioned the motivations and policies of elected Democrats from California who asserted that the Trump administration’s policies on western state wildfires were insufficient to deal with the disasters. This news release, originally published in the National Review with Administrator Wheeler’s byline, argued that a lack of forest management as opposed to climate change was the driving force for the fires, and portrayed California’s elected officials as unreasonably advocating for renewable energy policies. Administrator Wheeler concluded with a patronizing tone “instead of blaming the Trump administration for their problems, perhaps they should look to it for guidance.” In another [2019 news release, originally published as an op-ed in the New York Post](#), Administrator Wheeler argued New York governor Andrew Cuomo abused Section 401 of the Clean Water Act when he vetoed the construction of a gas pipeline in the state. This op-ed interposed what were policy and legal disagreements between a federal agency head, Wheeler, and Governor Cuomo with unnecessary name calling and a frivolous tone.

C. Hostility towards the Obama administration

Several news releases criticized Obama administration policies in overtly hostile ways, and some denigrated Obama administration officials as well. Among these were news releases that compared the Trump administration’s actions and environmental metrics with the Obama-era EPA, usually to undermine the previous administration’s accomplishments. [This July 2020 press release](#), for example, republished the contents of a Washington Examiner

op-ed summarizing the contents of an interview with Administrator Wheeler. This piece quoted Administrator Wheeler saying the Trump administration has accomplished more in environmental protection in one term than what the Obama administration did in twice the time. The article stated Obama-era regulations “stretched beyond the law” and quoted Wheeler saying regulatory actions at the EPA under his leadership improved upon less-effective existing regulations. Another [press release linked to an interview Administrator Wheeler did with the Federalist](#), in which he claimed the Obama administration was “regulating [fracking] to death.” Oftentimes news releases would mirror Administrator Wheeler’s hostile attitude towards the previous administration, such as [this news release](#) about the role an Obama-era EPA official’s activism played in shutting down an EPA study on PFAS, in which Wheeler’s insulting remarks were quoted without providing adequate contextual information on what was a nuanced debate about public health. Of note is an [unusual press release](#) that cited a Daily Caller article that claimed to confirm Administrator Wheeler’s suspicion “the Obama administration told the [National Climate Assessment] authors to take a look at the worst-case scenario.” The scenario Wheeler referred to is one of a “set of possible future conditions to inform analyses” [in the assessment](#). This news release did not follow the main argument of the Daily Caller article it refers to, which is that a U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) memo inappropriately pushed for only using an unrealistic worst case scenario in the National Climate Assessment. Instead, it suggested John Holdren, who formerly served as a head of the Office of Science and Technology during the Obama administration, was responsible for the aforementioned memo, which presumably confirmed Administrator Wheeler’s previous statement. The purpose of this news release is unclear, as it did not correct the record in any meaningful way, since the Fourth National Climate Assessment examined multiple scenarios, not just worst-case ones. The press release used an image of John Holdren and President Obama standing together, which was also used in the Daily Caller article, highlighting the political nature of the assertions.

All of these instigatory news releases followed a general pattern of using news releases towards political ends. They consistently lacked sufficient information to understand the context of the news releases, and instead provided substance to provoke an emotional response.

3. Promoting spin

Approximately 34% of politicized EPA news releases promoted [political spin](#), or “attempt[ed] to control or influence communication in order to deliver one’s preferred message.” In some cases, the EPA selectively included information that supported the

administration's version of events or exhibited exaggerated claims. In many cases, these distortions included the aggrandizement and misattribution of environmental successes to political appointees, namely the EPA administrator at the time, as well as the president. The contributions of the agency's staff and previous administrations were often left out. Aggrandizement of President Trump was especially common in 2020, when many news releases featured meetings and speaking engagements of Administrator Wheeler as he traveled across several states that were to be competitive during the 2020 general election.

A. Selective inclusion of facts

Using the selective inclusion of facts to support a political agenda blurs the lines between news and advertising that Ivy Lee clearly distinguished in his declaration of principles. EPA news releases under the Trump administration frequently crossed the line into the advertisement realm. They frequently presented information as "prompt and accurate;" however, through the selective inclusion of facts, the administration was able to tout the environmental or economic success of its actions while leaving out key information that would debunk the administration's claims. By leaving out conflicting information, the administration was able to create a positive narrative, even in cases where its actions sought to undermine the rules and regulations which led to such positive environmental outcomes.

A [2018 news release](#) about EPA's deregulatory agenda included an assertion that the EPA was showing progress in "regulatory reform" while also "advancing EPA's core mission of protecting human health and the environment." However, the news release only included facts about estimated reductions in regulatory costs, without any information regarding human health or environmental impacts. The news release also did not mention how the EPA planned to continue to provide environmental protections while rolling back the rules written to do so. In sum, this news release made a bold assertion and then included a very narrow set of facts that only supported one element of it. A reader skimming this news release may or may not realize that the EPA had not actually provided evidence for its claim that it could cut regulations and advance environmental protections as well.

A similar selective inclusion of facts was seen in [a 2020 news release](#) about a proposed rule to adjust cost-benefit analyses. The news release insinuated dishonest cost-benefit accounting prior to the proposed rule and asserted that the proposed rule would improve cost-benefit analyses and make them more consistent. However, it didn't mention that the rule purported to do this through restricting what could be included in the cost or benefit categories, nor did it explain that the primary change in the proposed rule was to exclude

many societal benefits from factoring into regulatory decisions. Without providing even basic information about the rule itself, this news release was another example of advertisement, seeking to mould public opinion without providing substantive information from which the public could develop their own opinions or begin to practice civic engagement.

News releases that described environmental progress over longer timeframes displayed an interesting pattern of spin promotion. These news releases invariably avoided descriptions of the regulatory reversals or other impediments to progress that occurred under the Trump administration. For example, a news release [highlighting a 2019 White House event](#) contained several credible claims about environmental progress over a decade or more, but also included multiple claims that were misleading with regards to the influence by the Trump administration on those issues. For example, the news release celebrated that “Over past decade, mercury emissions from power plants have decreased by nearly 90%,” but failed to mention that those emissions reductions came as a result of the mercury air toxics (MATS) rule, and in 2018, the Trump administration worked to undo the MATS rule by restricting its cost-benefit analyses, which the agency would later use to justify the 2020 roll-back of the MATS rule. Another somewhat misleading claim presented in the news release (and in President Trump’s speech) was that the United States had the number one ranked access to clean water in the world. This claim was challenged by Factcheck.org [in an article that pointed out](#) the 2018 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), from which the score was based, “designates 2016 as the year supporting the current scores for the drinking water category.” That ranking would reflect the environmental progress made before the Trump administration. On the other hand, the [2020 EPI](#), based on data from [2010 through 2019](#), ranked the United States’ sanitation and drinking water 26th globally. Although this news release qualified some of [the exaggerated claims](#) made by President Trump at the event by including statistics that showed environmental progress that pre-dated the Trump administration, it was still misleading about the administration’s influence on longer-term environmental progress.

B. Aggrandizement

A common type of spin promotion in EPA news releases during the Trump administration was simply the adulation of President Trump. For example, in [a September 2020 news release](#) relaying a speech Administrator Wheeler gave at the right-wing think tank American Enterprise Institute, President Trump was mentioned by name 15 times, including in the introductory sentence: “It is incontrovertible that today the environment is in better shape under President Trump than we found it.” The speech (and news release) credited

President Trump with several agency actions and presented misleading assertions, including celebrating the projected emissions reductions from the Affordable Clean Energy Rule without mentioning that higher emissions reductions would have been achieved if the Trump administration hadn't repealed the Clean Power Plan and replaced it with the Affordable Clean Energy Rule. Similarly, [a November 2020 news release](#) celebrated greenhouse gas emissions reductions and attributed them to President Trump without mentioning the administration's repeal of the Clean Power Plan, and it also did not mention external factors that may have reduced greenhouse gas emissions, [such as the global pandemic](#). This news release also selectively included whole topics similar to examples described in the previous sub-section, such as neglecting to discuss the economy even though it is titled "Greenhouse Gas Emissions Continue to Decline as the American Economy Flourishes Under the Trump Administration." Each of these news releases inappropriately portrays the environmental impacts of Trump administration policies, and fails to provide the public with satisfactory information to understand the landscape of environmental impacts.

Several news releases lauding President Trump covered trips that Administrator Wheeler had taken to meet with town and industry leaders and celebrate environmental progress, such as the clean up of a superfund site or the return to compliance with an environmental law. Despite the global pandemic, Administrator Wheeler traveled extensively during the summer and fall of 2020, with [a majority of his trips to swing states](#) such as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

In [a June 2020 news release](#) covering a meeting in Wisconsin, Administrator Wheeler and Regional Administrator Kurt Thiede spoke about President Trump's personal commitment to the Great Lakes. In [an August 2020 news release](#) covering a meeting in Pennsylvania, Administrator Wheeler discussed "President Trump's promise to cut burdensome and ineffective regulations," like those promulgated by the "Obama-Biden Administration." Though not in a swing state, campaigning appeared to take place [in a September 2020 speech](#) at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in California, highlighted in a news release, where Administrator Wheeler advocated for what EPA would do in "President Trump's second term."

The timing, frequency, locations, and attributions to President Trump in these 2020 trips and their news releases suggest that Administrator Wheeler actively sought to enhance the image of President Trump during a key election year. Agency and administration self-aggrandizement are prohibited in information disseminated by federal agencies and

using federal tax dollars (usually in annual appropriations acts), and the Hatch Act expressly prohibits campaigning by civil servants. The EPA and other agencies could and should more carefully navigate this issue of promoting agency actions without explicitly promoting the incumbent candidate.

It can be challenging to distinguish the difference between presenting agency actions in a positive light and promoting spin. By the selective inclusion of facts and self-aggrandizement of its actions, the Trump administration promoted spin and risked undermining the value and trustworthiness of news releases. Moreover, by failing to provide honest and accurate information to the public, the Trump administration undermined the public's civic engagement.

4. Posting articles already published in the press

News releases issued by federal agencies have generally adhered to standards with respect to the title, date, press contact, and content created by the Press Office or someone within an agency office. However, beginning in mid-2017, some EPA news releases began including the headline "In Case You Missed It" and later the acronym "ICYMI" as the lead-in, presenting postings of news articles and clips, interviews, and podcasts already published in media outlets. A full third of our sample, 66 politicized news releases, and several additional news releases that were not included in our sample, included the re-publishing of private news companies' articles.

Of the news releases in our sample that re-published articles, 30 included "In Case You Missed It" in their titles. While a link to the EPA Press Office was included at the top of the page, the byline of the journalist or author of the referenced media was also listed. In most instances, the ICYMI new releases copied the title and content of the referenced media, followed by the link text, "Click [here](#) to read the full article." Included among these pieces were [op-eds by an EPA representative](#) (often the current Administrator), [op-eds by the Editorial Board](#) of a newspaper in support of the administration, [articles with journalist bylines](#) in support of administration actions, as well as [links to interviews/podcasts](#) that included an EPA representative. Two of the final ICYMI's issued by Trump's EPA were Administrator Wheeler's bylines: a 12/20/20 Washington Times article titled "[Vanishing Congress cedes too much power to regulators](#)" and a 1/6/21 Wall Street Journal piece titled "[Why We're Ending the EPA's Reliance on Secret Science.](#)"

Several ICYMI releases presented the byline of the EPA Administrator coupled with that of another federal agency leader. For example, there were three news releases written with

then Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao, including a Wall Street Journal op-ed titled "[Make Cars Great Again](#)" and two written with R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Public Works, linking to the Kansas City Star ([12/11/2018](#) and [1/27/2020](#)) about authority being returned to the states under the Waters of the United States Rule. (Interestingly, the January 2020 EPA news release lists both James and Wheeler as authors, but the [Kansas City Star op-ed](#) to which it links only includes Wheeler's byline.)

Another ICYMI variation, which occurred 26 times in our sample, was to post the name of the news outlet as the lead-in, followed by the title of the published article, along with the media byline just below the EPA Press Office contact information. A [2018 news release](#), for example, is titled "Real Clear Policy: Scott Pruitt Leads the Way on Regulatory Rollback." Posted just below the EPA Press Office information was the media byline of Ken Cuccinelli, the then Director of the FreedomWorks Foundation Regulatory Action Center and later Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security. A link to the article in media outlet "Real Clear Policy" is provided, with a brief statement on the news release page that "This month, the Environmental Protection Agency released its EPA Year in Review for 2017–2018. To call it impressive would be a gross understatement. With Administrator Scott Pruitt leading the charge, the agency has shown unrivaled commitment to carrying out the president's agenda of deregulation." One week later, [a news release](#) titled "Wall Street Journal: The Fuel Economy Fraud" followed by "*Pruitt is right to rewrite rules that are mostly honored in the breach,*" lists the media byline of the Wall Street Journal Editorial Board with a brief statement and link to the article.

News Releases from Headquarters > Office of the Administrator (AO)



ICYMI: WSJ: A New Cost-Benefit Regulation Test

Figure 3. Example of an "In Case You Missed It" news release, published on October 1, 2018.

The ICYMI news releases created a troubling trend with respect to the responsibility of federal agencies in communicating with the public. With the names of news media channels highlighted in the EPA news release title, the agency was, in effect, promoting private media organizations on a federal public information site. From another angle, the agency could be seen as using the media coverage, especially in the case of cited editorials, to boost the credibility of its stance on an array of targeted policy matters. Section 5.4 of

the EPA's information quality guidelines exempts clearly labeled personal opinions and references to information distributed by others. These are exactly the types of posts represented in the ICYMI series of releases that take some of the strongest stances in support of agency actions and are not subject to the information quality guidelines.

Records of News Releases

The EPA makes agency news releases publicly accessible, with simple navigation from its [Newsroom homepage](#) to "[All news releases](#)," where a visitor is able to browse or search all recent news releases, including older news releases. The availability and ease of navigation to agency news releases, including selected news releases dating back to 1970, provide admirable public access to important agency records. Not all federal agencies provide this level of access.

However, there are some questions regarding the archiving of EPA news releases that need to be addressed. There does not appear to be a consistent standard for when news releases are migrated from the live website to the archive. More notably, the archive does not appear to contain all of the same information the live website had regarding news releases in a given year. For example, a [snapshot](#) (captured by the IAWM) of the news releases search page on January 24, 2019 indicates there were 1621 EPA news releases in 2018. However, there are only 1370 news releases [listed under 2018](#) in the news release archive. Meanwhile, the snapshot indicates there were 1062 news releases in 2017, but there are 1160 [listed under 2017](#) in the news release archive. These curious indexing issues pose a barrier to research, as the accessible data is rendered incomplete without prior knowledge of a specific URL or title.

The archiving of news releases also poses questions concerning the responsibility of the EPA with regards to the information contained therein. Is archived material subject to the EPA's information quality guidelines? Based on the [GAO's findings](#) that the EPA is responsible for all content and links contained in blogs that can be found on the agency's website despite publication date, one could reasonably assume that the EPA would have similar responsibility with regard to archived news releases. If an entity were to sue the EPA in 2021 for an incendiary news release from 2019, claiming it spread propaganda, would the Biden administration be responsible for its content if it were still accessible through the EPA's archive? These are important questions to grapple with in developing standards for archived content, especially news releases.

News releases under Obama and Biden administrations

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to thoroughly examine the contents of EPA news releases during the Obama and Biden administrations, but a brief discussion is included in Appendix A. Overt politicization through hostility toward other entities, partisan praise, and promotion of private news articles lauding agency leadership, do not appear to be present in EPA news releases during the Obama administration or thus far in the Biden administration. However, the subject matter, timing, and content of news releases are inherently political, and, following suit, EPA news releases have been constructed to portray the agency in a positive frame during each administration. Our review of the Trump administration's use and abuse of this platform to promote agency actions raises important questions about how to ensure the integrity of the public information news releases purport to present.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

EPA news releases during the Trump administration were mostly routine announcements related to agency activities and came from regional offices. However, approximately 4% of the news releases featured politicized content ranging from effusive self-promotion to politically-inflected distortions of facts. Rather than delivering information with a professional tone and relevant context, EPA news releases were used as campaign materials for a presidential election, stoked partisan discord, attacked the work of journalists and Democratic-party officials, and promoted private news organizations laudatory of the administration. These news releases undermined the public's ability to receive pertinent information about agency actions, likely disrupting trust in the agency or its disseminations. The goal of this report is not only to shed light on what occurred during the Trump administration, but to look forward, asking how to shape new policies that prevent keep agency news releases from becoming overt tools for manipulating public opinion.

To facilitate democratic oversight and participation in environmental decisions, it is critical to protect the integrity of the information coming out of agency press offices. However, our findings highlight potential difficulties in crafting policies for governing news releases. What information to share and how to frame it are intrinsically subjective and even political choices, and because of this, news releases are particularly susceptible to crossing the line

from informing to promoting partisan political agendas. For example, in response to the Trump administration's use of testimonials to convey unending support for agency actions, it may be tempting to issue a requirement regarding the breadth of perspectives presented. However, that would likely fall into a trap of presenting a false equivalency between opinions that are more or less tied to facts or evidence, which plagued mainstream reporting on ideologically charged topics like climate change for many years. A 2005 [Congressional Research Service](#) report on federal public relations activities found difficulty in making a distinction between propaganda and the type of information found in most federal agency news releases due to the ease with which differing presentations of facts can persuade or mislead the public (see pages 8-9). There are also questions about the applicability of content standards, like the IQA guidelines regarding the accuracy of information, to news releases. As the Trump administration showed, however, it cannot be taken for granted that agencies will not abuse the news release. With all of these challenges, how can we be sure that the information coming from news releases is reliable and minimizes partisanship?

Recommendations

Since news releases are one of the primary tools for agencies to communicate their actions to the public, the absence of a clear set of regulations or guidance is more than a niche issue. Current and future administrations should take into account what occurred during the Trump administration and consider how to ensure news releases are not used by an agency in the same way again. New initiatives to study and improve the quality of news release content would benefit a number of parties. Journalists, local government officials, scientists, and industry professionals would be better able to trust the information in these news releases if none of them were published to serve the narrow interests of administrators. Other members of the public, such as citizen scientists, residents living near superfund sites, and youths working on school projects might learn more from news releases if they provided links to more educational content. There's an opportunity to better engage the public through this medium, and creating a clear regulatory framework for what they should and should not include is essential to this task.

The following are basic tenets that we recommend to better protect the integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies through their news releases. These recommendations would require grappling with challenging gray areas, such as the spectrum from sharing a perspective to promoting propaganda; determining the party responsible for implementation may require careful discernment as well. Additionally, oversight of agency communications, both within and across agencies, is complex and

involves myriad offices with specific roles to fulfill in the federal information ecosystem. We provide these recommendations not with the expectation that they can immediately be implemented, but to usher in conversations about the underlying issues highlighted in this report and the paradigm shift necessary to promote and protect the integrity of federally provisioned information.

Convey professionalism

We believe government news releases should focus on delivering information to readers as opposed to serving as a platform for settling political disputes or praising the current administration's accomplishments in comparison with their predecessors. The tone used in news releases should be serious and respectful, even when referring to journalists critical of an agency's actions or officials from the opposite party. News releases should never seek to malign the character of individuals who criticize the agency's actions. When news releases adopt a pugnacious tone or exhibit sarcasm, they undermine the reputation of the government and its employees, who largely carry out their duties in a professional matter. In addition, the ambiguity inherent in this kind of communication could lead to misunderstandings and unwanted controversies. One of the characteristics that stood out the most in Trump-era EPA news releases was the pervasive use of snide and bombastic comments, particularly in news releases dramatizing disputes between figures in the administration and media outlets. These news releases were likely intended to rally supporters of President Trump as opposed to communicate how the agency was carrying out its mission.

Apply higher standards for newsworthiness

News releases should convey information that reflects the work and proceedings of departments and agencies. Unctuous praise for actions taken by an administrator or for new rulemaking pushes the boundaries of responsible federal communication. The "In Case You Missed It" series of news releases published during the Trump-era EPA served primarily as a dissemination tool for favorable media coverage of the agency's actions, as did the testimonial-based "What They Are Saying" series. Most of EPA's news releases cover topics such as grant awards and regulatory actions, which certainly merit publication. Editorials written in praise of the government's actions, disagreements playing out on Twitter and elsewhere in social media, and opinion pieces published in third party outlets all serve their own unique role in politics, and are better served by entities other than agency Press Offices using taxpayer money to operate. News releases should never consist exclusively of quotations from politicians and industry members. This type of content gives the impression the government is sanctioning these statements; in addition, these

statements are oftentimes subjective and are not easily fact checked. One avenue to guard against such news releases is to set clearer standards for the factual and contextual information that all news releases must include, which would also give the reader the opportunity to better understand the situation.

Ensure published information is accurate

Our recommendation for ensuring press releases contain accurate and authoritative information is relatively straightforward, and most press releases already follow these guidelines. Including links to authoritative sources of information, such as relevant government webpages, the Federal Register, and supporting documents, could help members of the public have confidence in the contents of press releases and in the agency itself. OMB's IQA Guidelines already [state](#) that agencies should identify the sources of information they publish. In addition, citations and links can serve as access points to additional information for readers to explore federal information resources. Helping the public evaluate the political and scientific perspectives included in news releases is important as well. Of course, there are a number of ways to present scientific information, and these may affect how the public interprets this information. Nevertheless, agencies should look to ensure people receive the most relevant research and background information while providing avenues for people to learn more.

Do not promote private news interests

Suffice it to say, republishing and promoting news and opinion pieces from private media outlets is fraught with issues. For one, it might give the impression an agency is aiding the financial interests of private news outlets, which could lead to numerous conflicts of interests. Second, OMB's IQA Guidelines clearly [identify](#) "integrity" as a central component of its requirements that necessitates protecting information "from unauthorized access or revision." Unless an agency reviews the entire contents of a privately published news release and makes any necessary corrections to ensure accuracy, "integrity" is not possible. Finally, searching, finding, and republishing information from other news outlets is an unnecessary expenditure on the government's part.

Do not use news releases as vehicles for campaigning

This recommendation reflects a troubling pattern we witnessed while reviewing EPA news releases during the Trump administration: the appearance of press releases that highlight actions taken by Administrator Wheeler that could have constituted Hatch Act violations. News releases should be vetted to ensure they do not amount to campaigning on behalf of the current administration, a violation of [the Hatch Act](#). Passed in 1939, this law helps

protect against the politicization of the federal workplace. It governs several activities government employees engage in, such as their behavior during state-funded travel. During the months preceding the 2020 presidential election, Administrator Wheeler [spent a significant and conspicuous amount of time traveling to and participating in events in states that were pivotal in deciding the results of the election](#). We cannot comment on whether the Office of Special Counsel should have investigated this behavior, but there are ways that press offices can be sure to avoid the appearance of impropriety when publishing news releases about these events. News releases covering the actions or activities of the current president or appointed head of an agency or department should avoid using laudatory language or attributing all credit to the individual. Especially during peak election season, this type of content steers too close to campaigning on behalf of an administration.

Ensure news releases are archived and accessible

News releases published by government agencies should be preserved on the web by the government in some form. Creating a news release archive, such as EPA's, would maintain a record of all previously published news releases that could serve members of the public or researchers wanting to find out more about past government activities. These archives should contain the entirety of previously published content, unlike the EPA Newsroom Archive, which does not list links to all the news releases that were archived, as we documented earlier in this report. It is important to emphasize that even if a news release is preserved, either through its original URL and location or by moving it to a web archive, they should still be accessible by searching or browsing government websites, since users would otherwise have to use a third-party search engine or the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine to find this content. The navigability of agency Press Office or newsroom websites should be checked periodically to ensure all news releases are actually findable on these websites. Sometimes published news releases are altered to correct errors or to update information, which we consider appropriate. However, if news releases are drastically altered after being published, there should be a note on the news release explaining these alterations.

Looking Forward

EDGI's Web Monitoring Team chose to produce this analysis of EPA news releases between January 2017 and January 2021 because, to our knowledge, there had not been a comprehensive review of this important type of information provision during the Trump administration. Our findings confirm the Trump administration's practice of pushing the boundaries of policy, law, and agency responsibility for communicating with the public. This

practice afforded us the opportunity to recommend a set of operational parameters to guide the creation and presentation of federal news releases, reinforcing the need for broader web governance practices across the public information landscape.

Our analysis focused on the EPA, but we encourage others to review news releases across all federal agencies to discern patterns that were unique to specific institutions and those that spanned the administration and to identify vulnerabilities to be addressed at each level. To truly understand how to address vulnerabilities, exploration of several policy and process areas will be essential, including a) the inner workings of federal agency press offices, including the roles of political appointees versus career staff, and the chains of command for press release decisions and content management; b) the regulatory backdrop of government public information, especially where authorities reside within and across agencies, and the role of OMB, GSA and agency Offices of the Inspector General in promulgation and enforcement; and c) the role of agency ethics offices in ensuring appropriate information provision through agency press offices.

The Trump administration proved useful in exposing policy gaps across the federal government that formal precedent and norms had previously veiled. The dearth of regulations managing information dissemination through agency press offices, as evidenced by the depths of politicization described in this report, is a prime example. EPA news releases under Obama and under Biden to date have been true to the guidelines we recommend, and, while the EPA under Michael Regan has used the news release vehicle to identify actions being taken to rescind or reverse those under Trump, the narrative in these cases has been straightforward and explanatory. Rather than relying on a return to professional norms in the years to come, however, it is important that actions be taken to address the vulnerabilities to the integrity of federal public information that the Trump administration so clearly exploited.

Appendix A. EPA news releases under the Obama and Biden administrations

Agency news releases are subjective communications where decisions on subject matter, timing, and content include elements of political intent. There is a spectrum, however, between news releases reflecting some amount of political background and their use as instruments in the politicization of issues or activities. While a thorough analysis of EPA news releases during the Obama and Biden administrations is outside the scope of this report, a brief review of those news releases suggests that the Trump administration used news releases at the EPA in notably different ways than neighboring administrations.

Over the course of a four-to-eight-year federal presidential administration, one would expect to see patterns in how news releases are published. A look back at releases under the Obama administration revealed some repeated thematic titles. The majority of EPA news releases under the Obama administration, similar to that of the Trump administration, publicized grants and awards for businesses and local governments. Three other common types of news releases—[ADVISORY/MEDIA ADVISORY](#), [TODAY](#), and [DATE AND TIME](#)—were targeted to alert the public and the media to press convenings, public testimony, or special appearances, often by the EPA Administrator. A fourth type, [FACT SHEET](#), went deeper in supporting the basis for the promulgation of a new regulation, standard, or EPA policy. This [FACT SHEET from 8/3/2015](#), for example, accompanied the announcement of the final Clean Power Plan rule. There were no examples of overt hostility in news releases or the republishing of private media company articles as news releases during the Obama administration.

The Obama administration did, however, set an example for the use of testimonies (which the Trump administration frequently employed) in news releases in these 2014 news releases about [a new fuel standard](#) and [the Clean Water Rule](#). However, these testimonials are different in character to those used by the Trump administration in two key ways. The first is that the testimonials are sourced from the private sector—businesses, organizations, and networks—or from environmental officials at the state level, whereas the majority of the “What They Are Saying” testimonials under the Trump administration were sourced from conservative politicians. The second is that there is a background section introducing the topic prior to the list of testimonials, which often was not the case in Trump administration “What They Are Saying” EPA news releases.

Like the Obama and Trump administrations, the majority of the Biden administration's EPA news releases are about grants and awards for businesses and local governments and Superfund cleanups. Along the lines of Obama's FACT SHEETS, the Biden administration's news releases also include several that provide substantive detail related to policy and program implementation, which was not common under the Trump administration. For example, on May 21, 2021, Administrator Regan announced [new advances in EPA's Energy Star program](#), with seven areas of commitment moving forward described. Likewise, this November 2, 2021, [news release regarding proposed methane emissions standards](#) provides broad and substantive information, including the purpose, intended environmental impact, and net economic impact of this rule. There are some news releases that refer to the Trump administration, primarily where actions have been taken to overturn or rescind rules and decisions. For example, a news release issued on May 26, 2021, titled "[EPA Implements Court Decision Overturning Restrictive Trump-Era Rule: Reaffirms Commitment to Use Best Available Science](#)," described the vacating of the Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science Rule. A news release from May 13, 2021, titled "[EPA Rescinds Unnecessary Benefit-Cost Rule](#)," explained President Biden's Executive Order 13990 and what it does with respect to the previous administration's actions. The assertions, while firm, are grounded in a straightforward explanation of the current actions being taken and do not use a hostile tone. There have not been examples of "What They Are Saying" testimonials under the Biden administration. The Biden administration has linked to private news articles in its EPA news releases, such as this [November 22, 2021, news release](#) about Administrator Regan's "Journey to Justice." There are two notable differences between the Biden administration's use of private news articles and the Trump administration's. The first is that the "In Case You Missed It" news releases under Biden include substantive information and context for the news articles linked in them. The second is that these news releases link to several different news articles from different outlets, rather than having an EPA news release dedicated to republishing or linking to one specific news article. Our research reveals nothing in the Obama and Biden administrations akin to the Trump administration's overt mingling of information output with op-eds and bylines from outside news media.

The extreme politicization of news releases by the Trump administration hasn't continued under the Biden administration, but the subtle political nature of them persists. For example, this [news release about EPA's Draft Strategic Plan](#) is a necessary communication to the public and highlights a couple of key components of the plan, but the decision about what to highlight (e.g. mentioning only two of seven overarching goals) and the depth of information provided are subjective decisions. Including a single quote from Administrator

Regan that focuses on the Biden administration's agenda is political in nature. There is a need for laws to not only constrain the kinds of overt politicization by the Trump administration, but also to bolster news release information integrity in more pedestrian ways as well.