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Science and Politics in the Bush Administration

Introduction:

The neoconservatives in the White House and Congress have been busy the last five years rolling back environmental, health and safety, and business regulations. Many of today's neoconservatives got their first exposure to power in the Reagan Administration when they made the mistake of implementing their policies openly. Reagan's appointments to EPA and the Department of Agriculture (the bureaucratic home of the Forest Service) were self-described right wing crazies and they generated so much bad press that the administration lost the initiative on public interest legislation and regulations.

The Bush Administration continues the neoconservative domestic agenda — weakening public interest and strengthening private interest regulations — but with less bad press and more success than Reagan. The neocons learned their lesson and now rather than proceeding openly, they dissimulate. They appoint moderates to lead the agencies they intend to undermine and use lower-level, less newsworthy appointments to weaken them. The Bush Administration has won bureaucratic victories on a broad front — endangered species, conservation, health and safety, energy policy and air pollution to name a few — but at the cost of their credibility. The neoconservative movement is bankrupt

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if it cannot proceed openly and honestly.

The Bush Administration has had a difficult relationship with the American scientific community. The federal government makes extensive use of scientists on a wide array of technical issues, and the Bush Administration has received scientific information at odds with their agenda on global warming and climate change, endangered species, women's health, AIDS, contraception, salmon, air pollution, water pollution, forest management and many other issues.

The science community is inclusive (all you need to belong is a Ph.D.), cosmopolitan and inherently skeptical. The Bush Administration has tamed the press and cowed a narrow majority of the electorate with war and threats of war but they have had little success bending scientists to their will. The

Union of Concerned Scientists has drafted a statement voicing concern over the misuse of science by the Bush Administration. The statement, *Restoring Scientific Integrity in Policymaking*, has been signed by forty-three American recipients of the Nobel Prize, sixty-three recipients of the National Medal of Science, 152 members of the National Academies and over 6,000 other American scientists. The statement can be found on the Web at www.ucsusa.org.

We spoke with Kurt Gottfried about his long-term perspective on science in public policy debates. It should be noted that the opinions expressed above are the editor's and are not necessarily those of Professor Gottfried.

ER: Professor Gottfried, what is your training?

KG: I'm a theoretical physicist. I got my Ph.D. at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1955 in nuclear physics and have been involved in nuclear and elementary particle physics throughout my career, which as you can see is not short at this point. Aside from basic research I've also written a couple of books, one in particular a major text on quantum mechanics which came out in the second edition two years ago and the first edition in 1966. After getting my degree I had a fellowship at Harvard and was an Assistant Professor at Harvard. Since 1964 I've been at Cornell on the faculty of the Physics Department. I spent three years on leave from Cornell in the 1970s as a

