

# Former Trump Campaign Aide, Non-Scientist Now in Charge of EPA Grants

John Korkus told staff he is watching for the “double C-word,” climate change.

*Ayana Byrd*, Colorlines SEP 6, 2017 [HTTP://WWW.COLORLINES.COM/ARTICLES/FORMER-TRUMP-CAMPAIGN-AIDE-NON-SCIENTIST-NOW-CHARGE-EPA-GRANTS](http://www.colorlines.com/articles/former-trump-campaign-aide-non-scientist-now-charge-epa-grants)

The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA), under Administrator Scott Pruitt, has upended how the Bush and Obama administrations handled awarding hundreds of millions of dollars in grant money.

According to an [article](#) published Monday (September 4) in The Washington Post, John Konkus, who works in the EPA’s public affairs office, has little background in science or the environment and was a Trump campaign aide, “reviews every award the agency gives out, along with every grant solicitation before it is issued.” Agency employees allege that Konkus has told staff he is on guard for what he calls “the double C-word,” or, climate change. Per The Post, he “repeatedly has instructed grant officers to eliminate references to the subject in solicitations.”

Since he began reviewing grants earlier this year, Korkus has eliminated funding for six projects, including a Bush-era program to address the indoor air pollution, that [disproportionately harms](#)

people of color in the United States. One out of every six Black children have asthma—the national average is one out of ten of children, according to [data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Indigenous children have the highest rates of asthma of any racial demographic in the country, and are [60 percent](#) more likely to have it than White children.

Korkus also cancelled a grant that was awarded for a one-day training session in Flint, Michigan, to help residents eradicate bedbugs. While Flint is typically in the news because of the city's lead water crisis, there is a growing bedbug problem in the [majority-Black](#) municipality. An EPA spokesperson told [The Post](#) that the award was cancelled because of the workshop's high price tag; it was for \$20,000, making it the smallest one that Korkus has denied so far. It was originally awarded to the [Midwest Pesticide Action Center](#), whose executive director told [The Post](#) that past sessions were full, adding, "People really do need this. For low-income communities, it's a really desperate situation."

Having a public affairs officer oversee the grants process is a departure from how decisions are normally made in the EPA. Says [The Post](#):

The ideological shift is a clear break from the practices of previous Republican and Democratic administrations. It bears the hallmarks not just of [EPA Administrator Scott] Pruitt's tenure but of President Trump's, reflecting skepticism of climate science, advocacy groups and academia.

Yet several officials from the Obama and George W. Bush administrations said they had never heard of a public affairs officer scrutinizing EPA's solicitations and its grants, which account for half of the agency's [roughly \\$8 billion budget](#).

"We didn't do a political screening on every grant, because many of them were based on science, and political appointees don't have that kind of background," said former EPA administrator Christine Todd Whitman, who served under Bush. She said she couldn't recall a time when that administration's political appointees weighed in on a given award.

Konkus joined the EPA in February to work on communications issues, [Politico reported](#). Now, per The Post, he is a deputy associate administrator in the public affairs office, where he "helps to publicize the funding of awards and serves more broadly as a grants adviser on policy and management issues."

Nonprofit Environmental Working Group [released a statement](#) this week that details its issues with Korkus:

Administrator Pruitt has given this former political operative a startling level of authority to play god with resources that could be used to clean up contaminated water in Flint or the chemical spill in Houston. That is an enormous amount of power for someone who has no apparent expertise in public health or environmental protection, but it shouldn't come as a surprise: neither does Pruitt.