

# Rachel's Environment & Health News

**#366 - Carol Browner And Environmental Justice: Words Versus Deeds At The EPA In Georgia**  
December 01, 1993

In his speech on earth day in April, President Clinton announced that he was asking the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Justice to formulate "an aggressive investigation of the inequalities in exposure to environmental hazards."

EPA Administrator Carol Browner testified before Congress May 6, 1993 saying, "We now believe that people of color and low income are disproportionately affected by some environmental risks--the risk of living near landfills, municipal waste combustors, or hazardous waste sites.... I have made environmental justice one of the key policy themes of my administration. Environmental justice must be woven into all aspects of EPA operations: rulemaking, permitting, enforcement, education, hiring, and outreach. Our program offices are expanding their data collection efforts in communities located near large sources of pollution in order to help us assess health impacts." [1]

While President Clinton and EPA chief Browner are making speeches about the importance of "environmental justice," EPA Region 4 in Atlanta has taken steps to oust a physician who has developed a technique for identifying disadvantaged neighborhoods threatened by pollution.

Dr. John R. Stockwell--a physician on loan to EPA from the U.S. Public Health Service since 1987--has been notified that Acting Regional Administrator Patrick Tobin wants him out of EPA as soon as possible. Stockwell is fighting the ouster, and has gathered support from activists across the south who say Stockwell's kind of work is precisely what the agency should be doing. Pat Bryant, executive director of the Gulf Coast Tenants Organization in New Orleans says, "This is an attempt to silence Dr. Stockwell when the only thing he is guilty of is telling the truth."

Stockwell believes he is being fired for having developed a computerized mapping system that uses existing data to draw maps of disadvantaged neighborhoods and the sources of pollution that may be threatening their health.

When Stockwell was initially recruited into EPA back in 1987, a memo from Winston Smith, director of the EPA Region 4 division of Air, Pesticides, and Toxics Management, said, "We respectfully request the transfer of Commissioned Officer John Robert Stockwell to the Environmental Protection Agency effective December 13, 1987.... Mr. Stockwell's medical background combined with many years of experience in environmental and occupational medicine, public health and management make him uniquely qualified to provide the immediate contribution sought by Region IV.

"Mr. Stockwell's expertise is specifically needed in carrying out health effect initiatives in our Region's Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) Program," Smith's memo said. "The TSCA program has been assigned one of the highest national priorities by EPA due to the proven imminent hazard to public health from toxic and hazardous materials. His immediate appointment to provide technical expertise in solving these environmental health effect problems will have significant impact on our needs and program objectives."

According to the ATLANTA JOURNAL AND CONSTITUTION, Stockwell's performance evaluations from his EPA supervisors have consistently included remarks such as "Recognized by peers as source of exceptional work," and "admirable work ethics," and "a source of high quality reports." [2]

Stockwell became known internationally as an expert on pollution in low income and minority communities. When Senator James Sasser (D-Tenn.) asked EPA Regional Administrator Patrick Tobin to study pollution in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Tobin assigned the task to Stockwell.

Stockwell had conducted a pilot study of Mobile Bay, Alabama,

developing his computerized mapping technique for pinpointing neighborhoods at risk. He was a logical choice to study Chattanooga.

On September 16, 1993--after Stockwell's preliminary report on Chattanooga was completed--Patrick Tobin issued a memo saying, "Dr. Stockwell's specialty is preventive medicine, and he has been employed in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional office since 1987.

"We have analyzed our needs for this specialty and have determined we no longer have a need for Captain Stockwell's services," Tobin's memo said. "Additionally, we have not been able to identify a need for Captain Stockwell within other EPA offices. Pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding between EPA and the PHS, we request that you initiate action to return Captain Stockwell to the PHS or other agency which has a need for this specialty," Tobin's memo said.

Stockwell's final study of Chattanooga has still not been released, though we have obtained a copy of the draft report. The draft report identifies areas of Chattanooga where poor people live and where major industries are releasing large quantities of toxic materials on a daily basis. Stockwell's present supervisor at EPA, Bruce Miller, spent more than an hour on the phone with us trying to explain why Patrick Tobin wants to oust John Stockwell from EPA. But after an hour we still had not heard a single plausible reason. The closest thing to a real reason we heard was this: Miller says one of Stockwell's recommendations in his report was controversial and did not fit EPA's mission. The specific recommendation was, "Given the POTENTIAL exposure [from chemical releases previously described] further study is recommended to determine whether this population is experiencing any increased environmental health risk." [Emphasis in the original.] So far as we were able to determine, it was this conclusion that put John Stockwell on the firing line. It is the only conclusion Bruce Miller would say EPA Region 4 does not go along with. Miller says flatly, "This is not the kind of study we do, trying to link specific diseases to specific chemical exposures." We pointed out to him that EPA scientists routinely publish studies linking pollutants such as lead and particulates (soot) to specific human diseases, but Miller simply repeated that EPA does not do this kind of work and Stockwell would be better placed in another agency. We pointed out that Stockwell's report did not even recommend that EPA should do the health studies--Stockwell simply said, "further study is recommended," not suggesting which agency should do the study. Miller continued to repeat that EPA does not do health studies linking specific chemicals to specific diseases and that Stockwell would be better placed somewhere else. Miller gave us permission to interview Stockwell, which we did.

Stockwell believes he is being punished for having published his findings about the situation in Chattanooga and other communities: "I found a triple whammy effect," he told us. "The greatest quantities of the most toxic chemicals are being released precisely in those communities that can least afford to cope with that type of pollution: the least educated, the poor, the non-white," he said. In sum, Dr. Stockwell believes he is being fired for having documented what others call "environmental racism" in Chattanooga--the placement of polluting facilities in neighborhoods that are poor, non-white and politically weak. [3]

Given President Clinton's speech on earth day and Carol Browner's testimony before Congress May 6, this hardly seems a controversial conclusion--certainly not one controversial enough to get a respected physician fired. But that appears to be what's going on in Region 4 in EPA, where environmental racism may indeed still be alive and well.

If you would like to help fight John Stockwell's dismissal from EPA, contact Connie Tucker, Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice, P.O. Box 10518, Atlanta, Ga. 30310;

phone (404) 243- 5229; fax: (404) 243-4028.

#### Other Developments in Environmental Justice

On November 4, 1993, U.S. EPA formally announced creation of a National Environmental Justice Advisory Council to "provide advice, consultations and make recommendations... directed at solving environmental equity problems." EPA is actively seeking suggestions for candidates for the Advisory Council; if you have names to suggest, send them to Clarice E. Gaylord, Director, Office of Environmental Equity, Mail Code 3103, U.S. EPA, 401 M Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20460. For further information, including copies of the Advisory Council's Charter, phone Mustafa Ali at (202) 260-6357. To suggest a candidate, you must provide name, occupation, position, organization, address, and phone number, and the candidate must submit a resume of their background, experience, and other relevant information. The deadline for suggesting names is December 10, 1993--next Friday.

#### Important Conference

Feb. 10-12, 1994, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is sponsoring an important conference called "Symposium on Health Research & Needs to Ensure Environmental Justice." The symposium will focus on "reinventing government to ensure environmental justice," including community participation/empowerment; federal agency policies, research agendas, and practices to ensure environmental justice; interagency coordination; new models for prevention and intervention. Key health issues to be discussed include sensitive populations; respiratory diseases; lead poisoning; hazardous waste; pesticide exposure; workplace hazards; and Superfund site hazards.

Limited funds are available for financial assistance to help people attend this important conference. For more information, phone (919) 541-2637 and leave your name, address, phone number, and any questions you might have.

--Peter Montague

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[1] Carol Browner, "Statement of Carol M. Browner, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, before the Government Operations Committee, United States House of Representatives," May 6, 1993, pgs. 3-4.

[2] Scott Bronstein, "EPA 'muzzling' doctor for fighting environmental racism?" ATLANTA JOURNAL/ATLANTA CONSTITUTION Nov. 11, 1993, pg. A4.

[3] Peter Montague, Traci Darnell and Brian Hunt, YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE; A CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN SOUTH CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE (Atlanta, Ga.: Greenpeace, 1991).

Descriptor terms: environmental racism; environmental justice; poverty; epa; john stockwell; pat bryant; chattanooga, tn; tn; mobile bay, al; al; air pollution; water pollution; tri; pollution prevention; national environmental justice advisory board; niehs; respiratory disease; lead; superfund; pesticides; occupational safety and health;