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White House Is Accused of Putting Politics Over Science

By [GARDINER HARRIS](#)

WASHINGTON, July 10 — Former Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona told a Congressional committee today that top officials in the Bush administration repeatedly tried to weaken or suppress important public health reports because of political considerations.

Dr. Carmona, who served as surgeon general from 2002 to 2006, said White House officials would not allow him to speak or issue reports about [stem cells](#), emergency contraception, sex education, or prison, mental and global health issues because of political concerns. Top administration officials delayed for years and attempted to “water down” a landmark report on secondhand tobacco smoke, he said in sworn testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

He was ordered to mention President Bush three times on every page of every speech he gave, Dr. Carmona said. He was asked to make speeches to support Republican political candidates and to attend political briefings, at least one of which included [Karl Rove](#), the president’s senior political adviser, he said.

And administration officials even discouraged him from attending the Special Olympics because, he said, of that charitable organization’s longtime ties to the Kennedy family.

“I was specifically told by a senior person, ‘Why would you want to help those people?’ ” Dr. Carmona said.

The Special Olympics is one of the nation’s premier charitable organizations to benefit disabled people.

Dr. Carmona joins a list of present and former Bush administration officials who assert that politics often trumped science within what had previously been nonpartisan government health and scientific agencies.

His testimony comes two days before the Senate confirmation hearings of his designated successor, Dr. James W. Holsinger Jr., who was nominated this year by President Bush. Two members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions have already declared their opposition to Dr. Holsinger’s nomination because of a 1991 report he wrote that concluded that homosexual sex is unnatural and unhealthy. Dr. Carmona’s testimony may further complicate Dr. Holsinger’s nomination.

Bill Hall, a spokesman for the [Department of Health and Human Services](#), said the Bush administration disagreed with Dr. Carmona’s statements about political pressure. “It has always been this administration’s position that public health policy should be rooted in sound science,” Mr. Hall said.

But Representative [Henry A. Waxman](#), the chairman of the House oversight committee, sharply criticized the Bush administration, saying it was putting politics above health issues.

“Political interference with the work of the surgeon general appears to have reached a new level in this administration,” Mr. Waxman said in his opening statement, adding, “The public expects that a surgeon general will be immune from political pressure and be allowed to express his or her professional views based on the best available science.”

In his testimony, Dr. Carmona said that at first he was so politically naïve that he had little idea how inappropriate the Bush administration’s actions were. He eventually consulted six previous surgeons general — Republican and Democrat — and all agreed, he said, that he faced more political interference than they did.

On issue after issue, Dr. Carmona asserted, the Bush administration made decisions about important public health issues based solely on political considerations, not scientific ones.

“I was told to stay away from those because we’ve already decided which way we want to go,” Dr. Carmona said.

He described attending a meeting of top officials in which the subject of [global warming](#) was discussed. The other officials concluded that global warming was a liberal cause and dismissed it, he said.

“And I said to myself: ‘I realize why I’ve been invited. They want me to discuss the science because they obviously don’t understand the science,’ ” he said. “I was never invited back.”

He said the science is clear that effective sexual education efforts must offer what he called a “comprehensive approach.”

“However, there was already a policy in place to only support sexual education efforts that discussed only abstinence, he said.

After serving one full term as surgeon general, Dr. Carmona was not asked by the White House to serve another. Before becoming surgeon general, he was in the Army Special Forces, earned two purple hearts in the Vietnam War, was a trauma surgeon and a leader of the Pima County, Ariz., SWAT team. He is now vice chairman of Canyon Ranch, a resort and residential development company.

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