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# GAO: Cheney Hindered Probe

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Dick Cheney (Photo: AP)

(AP) Congressional investigators say they were unable to determine how much the White House's energy policy was influenced by the oil industry because they were denied documents by Vice President Dick Cheney about his energy task force.

Investigators also came up short trying to find out how much money various agencies spent on creating the national energy policy, a General Accounting Office report released Monday said.

QUOTE

**The Cheney energy plan called for expanded oil and gas drilling on public land and easing regulatory barriers to building nuclear power plants.**

The unwillingness of Cheney's office to turn over records and other information "precluded us from fully achieving our objectives" and limited its analysis, the GAO said.

The GAO unsuccessfully sued the vice president last year to release information.

The Energy and Interior departments and the Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the GAO's report before it was released and chose not to comment. The vice president's office declined to look at it, the GAO said.

The National Energy Policy Development Group, chaired by Cheney, was formed by President Bush in January 2001 to develop a national energy policy.

The task force submitted its final report in May 2001. Congress is now considering the energy-related legislative proposals.

The GAO said the task force's report was the "product of a centralized, topdown, short-term, and labor-intensive process that involved the efforts of several hundred federal employees government wide."

In the few months between the start of the energy task force and its presentation of the final report, the vice president, some Cabinet-level and other senior administration officials and support staff controlled most of the report's development, according to the GAO.

They met frequently with energy industry representatives and only on a limited basis with scholars and environmentalists, the GAO said. The extent to which any of these meetings or information obtained from the energy industry influenced policy can't be determined, based on limited information made available to the GAO, the report said.

Two Democratic presidential candidates, Sens. John Kerry of Massachusetts and Bob Graham of Florida, on Tuesday criticized the administration for

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failing to release the energy task force documents and called on Cheney to produce the records.

"As gas prices reach historic levels and the nation's energy infrastructure is pushed beyond its limits, the Bush administration has decided their energy policy will be of the special interests, by the special interests and for the special interests," Kerry said in a statement.

Said Graham: "If the Bush-Cheney team has nothing to hide, then why are they hiding documents? There can be only one answer — they don't want the American people to know just how much influence the big oil companies have over U.S. energy policy."

Last December, a federal judge rebuffed congressional efforts to gather information about meetings that Cheney's energy task force held with industry executives and lobbyists while formulating the administration's energy plan.

The judge said the lawsuit filed by Comptroller General David Walker against the vice president was an unprecedented act that raised serious separation-of-powers issues between the executive and legislative branches of government. The comptroller general runs the GAO.

Some Democratic congressmen requested information in the spring of 2001 about which industry executives and lobbyists the Cheney task force was meeting with in creating the Bush administration's energy plan.

The Cheney energy plan called for expanded oil and gas drilling on public land and easing regulatory barriers to building nuclear power plants. Among the proposals: drilling in the Arctic wildlife refuge and possibly reviving nuclear fuel reprocessing, which was abandoned in the 1970s as a nuclear proliferation threat.

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