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AGs from Maine, Conn., question lawsuit origins

By Glenn Adams
 Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine - Attorneys general in two New England states suggested Monday that the White House is behind a lawsuit that seeks to invalidate a federal report on global warming.

Maine Attorney General G. Steven Rowe and Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, both Democrats, also asked U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft for an investigation.

Rowe and Blumenthal said they want to know whether White House officials working at the Council on Environmental Quality solicited a lawsuit filed by a conservative Washington think tank to discredit a 2000 report that documents the dangers of global warming.

The lawsuit was filed last week by the Competitive Enterprise Institute against the White House Office on Science and Technology.

Blumenthal said a June 2002 e-mail between a CEI executive and White House staffers "indicates a secret initiative by the administration to invite and orchestrate a lawsuit against itself to discredit an official United States government report on global warming dangers."

Such action, Blumenthal said, could constitute improper and possibly illegal conduct.

Rowe said the idea the administration is inviting a lawsuit from a special interest group in order to undermine the federal government's own work under an international treaty "is very troubling."

Dana Perino, spokesperson for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, dismissed assertions that the lawsuit was contrived as "100 percent false and absurd."

Perino added that the White House, which released copies of the e-mail in response to a Freedom of Information Act request, has been "perfectly forthcoming" about its communications with CEI.

A message left with the Justice Department was not immediately returned Monday afternoon.

The CEI's lawsuit argues that the National Assessment of Climate Variability and Change and the Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Action Report of 2002

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should be invalidated.

The latter report includes references to the National Assessment and documents similar likely impacts, Rowe and Blumenthal say in a letter to Ashcroft.

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