

Advancing the Scientific Integrity Act

Why Congress Needs to Protect Federal Science from Politicization

Political Interference in Government Science: a Threat throughout US History

Federal scientists are doing the work to ensure the protections that Americans want and support: clean air and water; safe food and medicine; consumer products that won't harm us; and protection from extreme weather events like floods and droughts and other damaging effects of climate change. Congress has empowered federal agencies to conduct scientific research to inform policy and decisions that affect people across the nation. The best science-informed policies rely on a basic principle: that science is independent and impartial. In documented cases dating back to at least the Eisenhower administration (Berman and Carter 2018), government officials have sidelined science for political, financial, and/or ideological reasons—often leading to the weakening of health and safety protections, especially in the most vulnerable and marginalized communities across the United States (Desikan et al. 2023).

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) has documented 326 violations of science in US presidential administrations from 2001 to 2024 (UCS 2025). The tactics used to undermine science have been similar across administrations and have included selectively editing of public documents or data; restricting scientists' communication; appointing unqualified individuals, or individuals with conflicts of interest, to science advisory committees; reducing scientific staff capacity; and restricting funding for, or inappropriately weakening or rescinding, science-based policy solutions. Federal agency scientific integrity policies have helped keep political or favored corporate interests from influencing scientific findings, but even strong scientific integrity policies may fall short.

Despite progress on scientific integrity at agencies during previous administrations (White House 2021), a presidential memorandum could easily undo any progress made to protect science, data and findings, and scientists. In September 2019, as a Category 5 hurricane neared the US coast, President Trump (during his first term) made false claims about the path of the hurricane (Rosenberg 2022). NOAA scientists rightly provided the correct information to the public but were later censored by political officials for contradicting the president (Halpern 2022). Now known as "Sharpiegate," the actions of those political officials shifted resources from hurricane efforts and caused public confusion and panic.

Scientific Integrity Prevents Special-Interest Meddling in Decisionmaking

Preventing federal scientists from providing critical scientific information to the public can endanger people's lives, especially during national emergencies. Thus, it is crucial that the US Congress codify scientific integrity into law and require all agencies to implement and enforce those laws. Agency scientific integrity—rooted in a commitment to science—should underpin all such policies, governing such processes as peer review; conflict-of-interest disclosures; transparent decisionmaking; public access to government science; scientific free speech; and the right of federal scientists to share research, express personal views, and report abuses without fear of retaliation.

Safeguarding scientific integrity also ensures more equitable decisionmaking. When government science is sidelined, the resulting decisions are less likely to meaningfully address and benefit the public. Especially underserved communities that are already facing cumulative impacts from a wide range of environmental, health, and socioeconomic factors that are likely to worsen (Desikan et al. 2019). Codifying scientific integrity would help build trust in agencies that make decisions about our health and environmental safety, products children use, and the quality of the food we consume.

The Scientific Integrity Act

The Scientific Integrity Act (H.R. 1106) is designed to ensure that agencies use robust and independent science in their decisionmaking processes, and that federal science and scientists are properly protected from inappropriate political influence in current and future presidential administrations. Sponsored by Representative Tonko (NY), the Scientific Integrity Act would codify scientific integrity protections at the national level, establishing the strongest protections for federal scientists and their work we have ever seen in modern history. Specifically, it would require federal agencies that fund or direct public science to establish and maintain clear scientific integrity principles. The act also clarifies that science should determine policy, free from political interference, ideology, or financial conflicts of interest. Lastly, the bill holds public scientists to the highest standards while guaranteeing their rights and protections under the law.

Federal science is at the very heart of how federal agencies keep our food and medicine safe, protect us from emerging diseases, and combat the effects of climate change, among other things. The passage of the Scientific Integrity Act will help protect federal science from political interference that can endanger the safety and livelihoods of the public.

Please contact your member of Congress at (202) 224-3121 to urge them to cosponsor the Scientific Integrity Act. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Van Theemsche, Washington Representative for the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, at lvantheemsche@ucs.org.

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