

HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout its first two years, the Trump administration has sidelined science in its handling of critical public health and environmental decisionmaking. Now, the 116th Congress can add an urgently needed check on administration actions. Congress can join with scientists and their supporters to stop the Trump administration's anti-science actions. Today's attacks on science can and will have substantial consequences for public health and the environment for decades to follow. We must continue to push back when science is sidelined. The current and future health and safety of our families our communities, and our nation depend on it.

Scientific Integrity Losses and Lessons for the 116th Congress

Censoring the Voices of Scientists

Open communication is critical to both the scientific process and an informed public. Preventing government scientists from presenting and discussing the results of their research hampers the advancement of science and impedes the government's ability to develop and utilize the best available science. Unnecessary political constraints on the ability of scientists to share their expertise prevents policymakers and the public from learning about scientific developments relevant to personal and societal decisions.

Examples

In its first two years, the Trump administration has repeatedly censored the voices of scientists:

RESTRICTED SCIENTISTS' COMMUNICATIONS

- The Department of Energy (DOE) prevented climate scientists from mentioning "climate change," "emissions reductions," or "Paris Agreement" in their communications.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) banned the use of seven words in budget-preparation documents: vulnerable, entitlement, diversity, transgender, fetus, evidence-based, and science-based.
- Scientists at the US Geological Survey (USGS) are currently required to obtain advance permission before speaking to reporters, despite the fact that the agency's scientific integrity policy specifies that the communications of-fice need only be "notified."

CREATED A CHILLING ENVIRONMENT

- Former Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Zinke summoned the superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park, David Smith, for an in-person reprimand of a science-based climate change Twitter thread on the park's official Twitter account.
- DOE officials influenced both the language and study design of a National Energy Technology Laboratory report.
- Labs funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have been temporarily banned by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from using fetal tissue for critical research on human diseases such as HIV, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's solely due to political, not scientific, motivations.

RESTRICTED SCIENCE AT CONFERENCES

- The DOI capped the number of USGS scientists at the 2017 American Geophysical Union (AGU) conference.

- The USGS enacted a new requirement for scientists to fill out an “attendee justification” form identifying how their research related to then Secretary Zinke’s “top 10 priorities” in order to attend the 2018 AGU conference.
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prevented at least 14 archaeologists from attending the Society for American Archaeology, a major conference in the field. One symposium was canceled as a result of the BLM archaeologists not attending.
- DOE prevented more than two dozen scientists from attending the International Atomic Energy Agency conference, a key international meeting on nuclear reactors. At least one panel was canceled as a result.
- politically motivated budget cuts in science programs and the shifting of resources away from politically contentious work.
- Further protect the rights of federal employees to speak out about waste, fraud, and abuse by expanding the 2012 Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act (WPEA) with the following provisions:
 - Add protection for federal employees against retaliatory investigations.
 - Expand the coverage of protections in Section 110 of the WPEA—which relates to evidence of censorship—to scientists in the intelligence community, military service, and government-contractor workforces.
 - Provide explicit protections for federal employees who blow the whistle on censorship and the suppression of science.
 - Pass legislation such as the Scientific Integrity Act to ensure the implementation of robust scientific integrity policies at federal agencies.

Recommendations

In the United States, federal scientists play an important role in disseminating scientific information by providing critical expertise to decisionmakers and the American people. But sometimes, political or commercial forces interfere with this process by altering data, silencing scientists, or preventing vital scientific information from reaching those who need it. Congress should use the range of oversight tactics at its disposal to investigate the public health, safety, and environmental harms caused by the administration’s actions sidelining science and make the case for proactive policy solutions to strengthen the role of science in policymaking. To push back against the censorship of scientists, Congress should take the following actions:

- Use the range of oversight tactics at its disposal to investigate threats to federal scientists and to the processes and functioning of federal agencies. Such threats include:
 - censorship and intimidation of scientists engaged in climate change-related work, especially at the DOI;
 - shifting of government resources away from federal scientists through such means as restricting employee travel and withholding funds from politically contentious research topics; and
- Explore ways to strengthen the use and quality of independent science advice it receives through structures such as the Congressional Research Service, the Government Accountability Office, or through the restoration of the Office of Technology Assessment.
- In response to Trump administration efforts to defund and shift resources away from politically contentious topics, hold hearings that demonstrate the public value of science-based programs and policies, such as:
 - the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Integrated Risk Information System;
 - the EPA’s use of scientific data and studies in its regulatory processes;
 - scientific integrity policies and infrastructure across agencies; and
 - climate change research, resilience, and preparedness programs.

The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet’s most pressing problems. Joining with people across the country, we combine technical analysis and effective advocacy to create innovative, practical solutions for a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.

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