

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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AUTHOR: John Holdren
AFFILIATION: OSTP
ADDRESSEE: CHRM Gregory cc: Jaczko
SUBJECT: Concerns the quality of scientific work being conducted in federal agencies

ACTION: Information
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LETTER DATE: 11/23/2011

ACKNOWLEDGED No

SPECIAL HANDLING: OGC/EDO for App.Action.
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DATE DUE:

DATE SIGNED:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20502

November 23, 2011

The Honorable Darrell Issa
Chairman, Oversight and Government Reform Committee
2471 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Vitter
U.S. Senate
SH-516 Hart
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
US Senate
SR-205 Rayburn
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Issa, Senator Vitter, and Senator Inhofe:

I write in response to your letter dated October 18, 2011, raising concerns with the quality of scientific work being conducted in federal agencies. The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) appreciates the opportunity to address your concerns.

Congress has charged OSTP with several important missions relating to federal science and technology policies and programs. The “primary function” of our Office is to provide advice to the President and others in the Executive Office of the President (EOP) on the “scientific, engineering, and technological aspects of issues that require attention at the highest levels of Government.” 42 U.S.C. § 6613(a). We are also responsible for “evaluating the scale, quality, and effectiveness of the Federal effort in science and technology,” and assisting with “general leadership and coordination of the research and development programs of the Federal Government.” 42 U.S.C. § 6613(b). These wide-reaching statutory responsibilities demand that OSTP carefully focus its limited resources and rely heavily on the expertise and experience of federal agencies.

In its statutory leadership role, OSTP has placed a special emphasis on promoting policies that enhance scientific integrity. Sound science and technology are essential to achieving a broad range of national goals: driving economic growth and job creation; helping Americans live longer, healthier lives; developing clean sources of energy that reduce our dependence on foreign oil; protecting our environment for future generations of Americans; strengthening national and homeland security; and more. Realizing the potential of science and technology to help achieve these goals requires that the Administration’s decisions about public

policy be guided by the most accurate and objective scientific advice available. The public must be able to trust that advice and be confident that public officials will not conceal or distort the scientific findings that are relevant to policy choices.

In his March 9, 2009, memorandum, President Obama set forth six guiding principles on scientific integrity for the Executive Branch and assigned to the Director of OSTP “the responsibility for ensuring the highest level of integrity in all aspects of the executive branch’s involvement with scientific and technological processes.” I take my responsibility for ensuring scientific integrity in the executive branch very seriously, and issued a memorandum on December 17, 2010, to provide further guidance to Executive Branch departments and agencies on implementing the Administration’s policies in this area. Since I issued that memorandum, and in cooperation with my office, agencies throughout the Executive Branch have reexamined their practices and policies on scientific integrity and drafted new or revised policies to meet the standards set by this Administration.

OSTP is currently reviewing the draft policies crafted by each agency pursuant to the December 17, 2010, memorandum. Some of these policies are now in final form, and others are well on their way to completion. I have set a deadline of December 17, 2011, for departments and agencies to submit draft versions of their final policies to my office. The six principles prescribed by the President in his March 9, 2009, Presidential Memorandum have been in effect since that date, setting the tone for this Administration’s very strong commitment to scientific integrity.

An important part of each agency’s commitment to scientific integrity is its response to allegations of scientific misconduct within the agency. Indeed, in his March 9, 2009 Memorandum, the President directed that “[e]ach agency . . . have in place procedures to identify and address instances in which the scientific process or the integrity of scientific and technological information may be compromised.” Your letter raised specific concerns about several incidents of alleged scientific misconduct in federal agencies. Because the relevant federal agencies are in the best position to address these incidents, OSTP respectfully refers you to those agencies for further information on the specific cases raised in your letter.

I appreciate your recognition of the United States government’s important role in scientific research and development, and the indispensable contribution it makes to our nation’s continued economic, technological, and military leadership. Every day, federal scientists pursue a broad range of high quality, high value research across federal agencies and labs. Scientific integrity is a pillar of those efforts and of our nation’s leadership. Government scientists must be free to pursue the truth without pressure to reach certain results, and must be free from unfair political attacks by those who find valid scientific results inconvenient for their agenda. OSTP shares your commitment to these goals.

Sincerely,



John P. Holdren
Director

Cc: The Honorable Steven Chu, Secretary, Department of Energy
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary, Department of the Interior
The Honorable David Hayes, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior
The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
Dr. Paul Anastas, Science Adviser, Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
The Honorable Gregory Jaczko, Chairman, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
The Honorable Elijah Cummings, Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform
The Honorable Dennis Kucinich, Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight, and Government Spending