

Science and the Public Interest

An Open Letter to President-Elect Trump and the 115th Congress

Scientific knowledge has played a critical role in making the United States a powerful and prosperous nation and improving the health and well-being of Americans and people around the world. From disease outbreaks to climate change to national security to technology innovation, people benefit when our nation's policies are informed by science unfettered by inappropriate political or corporate influence.

To build on this legacy and extend the benefits of science to all people, including Americans who have been left behind, the federal government must support and rely on science as a key input for crafting public policy. Policy makers and the public alike require access to high-quality scientific information to serve the public interest. There are several actions Congress and the Trump administration should take to strengthen the role that science plays in policy making.

First, creating a strong and open culture of science begins at the top. Federal agencies should be led by officials with demonstrated track records of respecting science as a critical component of decision making. Further, recognizing that diversity makes science stronger, administration officials should welcome and encourage all scientists regardless of religious background, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Second, Congress and the Trump administration should ensure our nation's bedrock public health and environmental laws—such as the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act—retain a strong scientific foundation, and that agencies are able to freely collect and draw upon scientific data to effectively carry out statutory responsibilities established by these laws. They should also safeguard the independence of those outside the government who provide scientific advice.

Third, Congress and the Trump administration should adhere to high standards of scientific integrity and independence in responding to current and emerging public health and environmental threats. Decision makers and the public need to know what the best-available scientific evidence is, not what vested interests might wish it to be. Federally funded scientists must be able to develop and share their findings free from censorship or manipulation based on politics or ideology. These scientists should, without fear of reprisal or retaliation, have the freedom and responsibility to:

- conduct their work without political or private-sector interference;
- candidly communicate their findings to Congress, the public, and their scientific peers;
- publish their work and participate meaningfully in the scientific community;
- disclose misrepresentation, censorship, and other abuses of science; and
- ensure that scientific and technical information coming from the government is accurate.

Finally, Congress and the Trump administration should provide adequate resources to enable scientists to conduct research in the public interest and effectively and transparently carry out their agencies' missions. The consequences are real: without this investment, children will be more vulnerable to lead poisoning, more people will be exposed to unsafe drugs and medical devices, and we will be less prepared to limit the impacts of increasing extreme weather and rising seas.

These steps are necessary to create a thriving scientific enterprise that will strengthen our democracy and bring the full fruits of science to all Americans and the world. The scientific community is fully prepared to constructively engage with and closely monitor the actions of the Trump administration and Congress. We will continue to champion efforts that strengthen the role of science in policy making and stand ready to hold accountable any who might seek to undermine it.

Sampling of Prominent Signatories

*Nobel Prize

†National Medal of Science

Andreas Acrivos†
Stanford University

Peter Agre*
Johns Hopkins University

Jeffrey H. Altschul
Statistical Research, Inc.

Kenneth J. Arrow*†
Stanford University

Francisco J. Ayala†
University of California, Irvine

David Baltimore*
California Institute of Technology

Mark A. Barteau
University of Michigan

Georges C. Benjamin
American Public Health Association

R. Stephen Berry
University of Chicago

Lewis M. Branscomb
University of California, San Diego

Ken Caldeira
Carnegie Institution for Science

Mark A. Cane
Columbia University

F. Stuart Chapin III
University of Alaska

Eric Chivian*
Harvard Medical School

Robert W. Corell
Global Science Associates

Gretchen C. Daily
Stanford University

Ruth DeFries
Columbia University

Rodolfo Dirzo
Stanford University

Philip B. Duffy
Woods Hole Research Center

Paul R. Ehrlich
Stanford University

Kerry Emanuel
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

James A. Estes
University of California, Santa Cruz

Christopher B. Field
Stanford University

Edmond H. Fischer*
University of Washington

Charles A. Francis
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Richard Garwin†
IBM Fellow Emeritus

Peter H. Gleick
Pacific Institute

Kurt Gottfried
Cornell University

Carol W. Greider*
Johns Hopkins University

Roger Guillemin*
The Salk Institute for Biological Studies

James E. Hansen
Columbia University

James S. Harris
Stanford University

Oliver Hart*
Harvard University

Geoffrey M. Heal
Columbia University

Dudley R. Herschbach*
Texas A&M University

Roald Hoffmann*†
Cornell University

Kathy Jacobs
University of Arizona

Daniel H. Janzen
University of Pennsylvania

Daniel M. Kammen
University of California, Berkeley

Anne R. Kapuscinski
Dartmouth University

David Keith
Harvard University

Kenneth H. Keller
John Hopkins University

Wolfgang Ketterle*
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Daniel Kleppner†
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Lawrence M. Krauss
Arizona State University

Neal F. Lane
Rice University

Anders Levermann
Columbia University

Simon A. Levin†
Princeton University

Michael C. MacCracken
Climate Institute

Eric S. Maskin*
Harvard University

James J. McCarthy
Harvard University

Bonnie McCay
Rutgers University

Jerry M. Melillo
Marine Biological Laboratory

James Merchant
University of Iowa

Matthew S. Meselson
Harvard University

William E. Moerner*
Stanford University

Mario J. Molina*
University of California, San Diego

William Moomaw
Tufts University

Harold A. Mooney
Stanford University

K.M. Venkat Narayan
Emory University

Michael Oppenheimer
Princeton University

Jonathan Overpeck
University of Arizona

Stephen Pacala
Princeton University

C. Kumar Patel†
University of California, Los Angeles

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.

Stuart L. Pimm

Duke University

Thomas Dean Pollard

Yale University

John P. Reganold

Washington State University

Linda Rosenstock

University of California, Los Angeles

Liane B. Russell

Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Benjamin Santer

Member, National Academy of Sciences

Randy Schekman*

University of California, Berkeley

William H. Schlesinger

Duke University

Robert J. Shiller*

Yale University

Charles Sing

University of Michigan

Susan Solomon†

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Thomas A. Steitz*

Yale University

Karel Svoboda

Howard Hughes Medical Institute

Max Tegmark

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Kevin E. Trenberth

National Center for Atmospheric Research

Harold E. Varmus*†

Weill Cornell Medical College

Steven Weinburg*†

University of Texas at Austin

Zena Werb

University of California, San Francisco

Eric F. Wieschaus*

Princeton University

Frank Wilczek*

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Robert Woodrow Wilson*

Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

Steven C. Wofsy

Harvard University

George M. Woodwell

Woods Hole Research Center

Melinda A. Zeder

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

For the complete list of signatories, please visit www.ucsusa.org/trumpscientistletter.