



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Joint Subcommittee Hearing:
Scientific Integrity in Federal Agencies
Wednesday, July 17, 2019

Good morning to our witnesses and welcome to the hearing.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the Scientific Integrity Act, and I commend Congressman Tonko for his hard work in preparing the bill.

As I see it, scientific integrity consists of two major elements. The first is respect for the truth. Science does not have a political agenda. When science is done well, when trained professionals can follow the data and subject their findings to rigorous peer review, the information speaks for itself. The meaning of science-based decision-making is being informed by the best possible science and deciding what to do.

The second is respect for scientists themselves. As I see it, a big part of scientific integrity is allowing the scientists who serve this country to conduct their work unimpeded by undue outside influence. It's about allowing them to speak freely in their capacity as experts with the American public and the media. It's about allowing them to serve on advisory boards, join scientific societies, and engage with the scientific community. Unfortunately, we know that federal agencies do not always make this possible for their scientists. Sometimes Congress throws up roadblocks for federal scientists, too, and we need to do better.

On a related note, I want to share my disappointment about who is missing from our panel of witnesses today. The Committee invited Dr. Francesca Grifo, the Scientific Integrity Official for EPA, to testify. Of all the Scientific Integrity Officials across the two dozen or so agencies that conduct or oversee science, Dr. Grifo is arguably the most experienced, and EPA's Scientific Integrity policy is among the most robust. We were eager to hear from her about EPA's process for implementing their policy and handling staff issues, as well as best practices to consider.

But EPA refused to make Dr. Grifo available and offered another official, the Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for Science, in her place. While we appreciate this person's credentials and experience, she has never served as a scientific integrity official for a federal agency. She did not help draft the EPA Science Integrity Policy, and she has never personally adjudicated a formal complaint from a federal scientist. We wanted to hear from Dr. Grifo because she hears

directly from EPA employees who have concerns, questions and disputes. A major purpose of this hearing is to understand the day-to-day experiences of a scientific integrity official. EPA did not explain to this Committee why it would not make Dr. Grifo available, but only stated in vague terms that they believed their alternate official would be “adequate” for today’s meeting. As the Chairwoman of this Committee, I believe EPA’s response to our invitation was not adequate, and I hope to hear from Dr. Grifo at a future date.

Nevertheless, I know the panelists who are before us today are capable of assisting the Committee with their insights and experiences and I look forward to their testimony.

I yield back to Chairwoman Stevens.