



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

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

Thank you Chairwoman Stevens. It's a great pleasure to be here today at this joint subcommittee hearing. I'm pleased as always to see my colleagues on both sides of the aisle as we consider the very important issue of scientific integrity in government.

When we talk about scientific integrity, we are talking to a large extent about rules and procedures. Federal agencies must have explicit rules in place to affirm that scientific research will be free of political interference and that academic honesty will not be punished by harassment or retaliation. They also need formal procedures in place for the fair, timely and transparent resolution of allegations when they are made. One of our tasks here today is to assess whether the scientific integrity policies currently used by executive branch agencies do enough to protect science and the public servants who conduct it.

Rules and procedures, however, are only one part of the answer. It is equally important to foster a culture of respect for science throughout the government. Federal agencies need to listen to scientists and allow them to do their work unhindered by political considerations. They also need to appreciate the value of science in policymaking and actively incorporate scientific findings into the deliberative process. The leadership of an agency should never be hostile to its scientists or treat scientific findings as a threat. Any leader who would do so is merely revealing that their beliefs are determined by ideology rather than the facts. That kind of thinking is pernicious and does not serve the public.

Let me talk about an example that's important to this Committee. In March, we held a hearing about the IRIS program at the Environmental Protection Agency. We heard how EPA took steps last December to eliminate important chemical assessments from the program's workflow – thus preventing the public from seeing the latest science on how exposures to these chemicals affect human health. We know that EPA's decision to sideline these studies is not about a lack of resources. In fact, we know that EPA's assessment of formaldehyde through the IRIS program is *already done*. The former EPA Administrator, Scott Pruitt, told a Senate Committee himself that the formaldehyde assessment was ready for "imminent" release way back in January 2018. This

assessment is the culmination of countless hours of work from dedicated EPA scientists over more than a decade. Its findings would mean a lot for understanding the respiratory health and cancer risks of formaldehyde and help inform decision-making that will keep workers and children safe. But keeping the study out of the public eye apparently means a lot to special interests.

If this episode at IRIS isn't political interference in science, I don't know what is. This kind of activity is exactly why robust scientific integrity policies are needed.

And we should never lose sight of why scientific integrity is so important. America faces immense challenges today: accelerating climate change, attacks on women's health, dangerous chemicals in our water and our workplaces, aging transportation networks, and so much more. We cannot adequately understand these threats – let alone address them – with anything less than the best possible science. We also need a government that communicates scientific information clearly and effectively to the American people. This nation has the best scientists in the world, and the ones that work with the federal government are working to help us overcome the greatest challenges of our time. When we allow federal scientists to do their jobs without interference, their efforts make the country stronger, safer and more prosperous.

I'm proud to be a cosponsor of the *Scientific Integrity Act*. This bill will codify scientific integrity policies at federal agencies and strengthen them in crucial ways. It will guarantee that federal scientists can conduct research freely, present findings honestly, communicate information openly, and engage with the scientific community. It will also ensure that when scientific integrity violations do occur, federal scientists know their rights and can report the violations to designated officials who are empowered to help. If H.R. 1709 becomes law, scientific integrity in the federal government will stand on a much firmer foundation. I want to thank Representative Tonko, Chairwoman Johnson and Chairwoman Stevens for their leadership on this issue.

We have a distinguished panel for the hearing today, and I thank the witnesses sitting before us. The subject of this hearing impacts us all.

Thank you and I yield back.