



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

Opening Statement

Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY)

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

Thank you Chairs Johnson and Stevens for today's hearing and for joining me as two of the four original cosponsors introducing the Scientific Integrity Act! Thanks to Chairwoman Sherrill for your strong support of the Scientific Integrity Act and to the 200 members who have supported this commonsense, good government legislation.

I also want to thank my colleague and friend Dr. Baird for coming today with an open mind on the nonpartisan need for strong, consistent scientific integrity policies. Mr. Norman, I look forward to speaking with you more about this critical issue as well.

Every time government scientific reports are delayed, distorted or hidden, the American people pay the price in the form of lost rights and freedoms, lost wages to medical bills, burned or flooded homes, lost years from our lives and the irreplaceable loss of loved ones. As an engineer with a deep respect for science, federal scientific integrity standards have been a concern of mine for many years. Allowing political power or special interests to manipulate or suppress federal science hurts all of us. It leads to dirtier air, unsafe water, toxic products on our shelves and chemicals in our homes and environment. And it has driven federal inaction in response to the growing climate crisis.

Scientific integrity is a longstanding concern that transcends any one party or political administration, but the abuses directed by this President and his top officials have brought a new urgency to the issue. Still, it must be said that, whether a Democrat or a Republican sits in the Speaker's chair or the Oval Office, we need strong scientific integrity policies.

I began working on the Scientific Integrity Act in the summer of 2016 when we had a Democratic administration. And at that time, I believed that the next Administration would likely be a Democratic Administration as well. More than 20 federal agencies have introduced some form of a scientific integrity policy to create a firewall between science and the political and special interests that seek to influence, suppress or distort it. But those policies are uneven in their enforcement and scope. As a result, vital information and scientific analysis falls between the cracks—especially now in an administration that prizes appearances often at the expense of the facts.

The Scientific Integrity Act, H.R. 1709, would protect public scientific research and reports from the distorting influence of political and special interests by ensuring strong scientific integrity standards at America's science agencies. The bill is supported by nearly 200 members. More than 60 organizations sent a letter in support of Congress moving the Scientific Integrity Act forward. The list of organizations not only includes scientists but also government accountability groups such as Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, environmental groups such as Defenders of Wildlife, women's health organizations such as the National Partnership for Women & Families, and unions such as SEIU. Madame Chair, I ask that this letter be entered for the record.

Science doesn't serve political power, it just tries to tell us the truth. And that is always worth protecting. I hope that as a committee we can all work together to strengthen scientific integrity policies and ensure that we are upholding high scientific standards across all agencies, no matter who holds the reins of political power.

Madame Chair I also request to enter for the record a letter from the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) in support of the Scientific Integrity Act. PEER is a non-profit group that works nationwide with government scientists, land managers, law enforcement agents, field specialists and other leading environmental professionals.