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AND CLIMATE CHANGE
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COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,
AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

October 27, 2020

Dr. Kelvin K. Droegemeier
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Dr. Droegemeier,

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light egregious violations of scientific integrity by this administration. While a lack of baseline standards, enforcement of and coordination of scientific integrity standards has long undermined the work and credibility of our federal efforts, the response of our public agencies to the COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the price of these violations in terms of avoidable sickness, suffering and lives lost.

This pandemic has exposed not only the need for us to strengthen and enforce scientific integrity policies among federal agencies, but also the need to develop coordination across agencies. Currently, differences in the strength and specificity of scientific integrity guidelines at federal agencies are compromising their effectiveness, especially on issues spanning multiple agencies, including COVID-19 and other emergency response efforts.

We can see this need illustrated by several troubling reports of political interference in the federal scientific enterprise. They include but are not limited to:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and White House political appointees altered and delayed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) scientific publications.¹²
- Public health experts and scientists at the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority experienced retaliation and harassment for resisting pressure

¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/09/emails-show-hhs-muzzle-fauci-410861>

² https://apnews.com/921ad7f1f08d7634bf681ba785faf269?utm_medium=AP&utm_source=Twitter&utm_campaign=SocialFlow

from political leaders to make potentially harmful drugs available as COVID-19 therapies.³

- Political appointees attempted to censor CDC officials by preventing them from sharing basic facts about COVID-19 with the public.⁴
- Political appointees at HHS sought to direct what Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, should say during interviews in order to promote positions contrary to scientific evidence.⁵
- HHS and the White House Coronavirus Task Force published information on the CDC's website that was contrary to science and evidence from CDC officials without CDC approval.⁶
- Administration officials inappropriately pressured Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) and attempted to delay or prevent guidance from being issued on vaccine standards to ensure safety.⁷
- The Administration refused requests to provide public health experts for interviews.⁸

These violations have had deadly consequences, and they continue to present severe threats to public health and safety.

The American people have every right to access trusted sources of information to protect their own health and the health of their friends and family. Schools, emergency services, local communities and states also rely on this information to make critical decisions in order to protect students, teachers, nursing home residents, hospital patients, doctors, nurses, emergency responders and essential workers.

For the good of the country and the credibility of our federal pandemic response, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) must take steps to ensure scientific integrity is protected and strengthened for the duration of this crisis and beyond. I am requesting your response to the following questions related to OSTP's role in scientific integrity protection, enforcement and coordination.

- During this critical time, what actions have you taken to further ensure that every federal science agency is enforcing their scientific integrity policies during the pandemic? Do you have further actions planned?

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/08/office-special-counsel-says-reasonable-grounds-believe-vaccine-officials-ouster-was-retaliatory-lawyers-say/>

⁴ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/09/emails-show-hhs-muzzle-fauci-410861>

⁵ Id

⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/11/exclusive-trump-officials-interfered-with-cdc-reports-on-covid-19-412809>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/05/us/politics/coronavirus-vaccine-guidelines.html>


⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/09/media/pence-office-tv-bookings-coronavirus/index.html>

- When was the last time OSTP convened scientific integrity officials from various agencies to learn about pandemic-related concerns and scientific integrity violations? How often have you convened the scientific integrity officials to discuss ongoing concerns, best practices and lessons learned? And have you talked to agency leadership about scientific integrity concerns related to the pandemic?
- It appears that many scientific integrity violations have involved ambiguity around interagency relations. For instance, the scientific integrity investigation related to Hurricane Dorian identified issues between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce. It appears we are seeing this again with HHS, FDA, CDC, NIH and other public health and science agencies. What role, if any, is OSTP serving during the pandemic to ensure that interagency relationships and the differences in their respective policies do not compromise scientific integrity?
- Are you documenting allegations of censorship, harassment or threats directed at scientists working on issues related to the pandemic? What agencies have ongoing or completed scientific integrity investigations related to coronavirus related research or response? And how many cases are open and ongoing at each of these agencies? How many cases involve interagency relationships, and in these cases, which agencies are included?
- Has the COVID-19 crisis caused you to consider the need to strengthen the enforcement or interagency coordination of scientific integrity policies?

I continue to work in Congress to pass the H.R. 1709, the *Scientific Integrity Act*, and codify OSTP's role in ensuring baseline standards for the creation and enforcement of scientific integrity policies. While the *Scientific Integrity Act* has passed in the House several times, it awaits action in the Senate.

In our nation, COVID-19 has already taken more than 224,000 lives, infected 8.6 million, and we face a troubled and possibly worsening outlook for the weeks and months ahead. For the good of our nation and the people we are sworn to serve, OSTP must ensure that scientific integrity is protected. If you would like to discuss these requests further, please have your staff contact Emily Silverberg at 202-225-5076.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Tonko". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Paul Tonko
Member of Congress