

7 December 2017

The Honorable Greg Walden  
2185 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
237 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus  
2217 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko  
2463 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Walden and Shimkus and Ranking Members Pallone and Tonko:

On behalf of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and its more than 60,000 scientist members, I am writing to express concerns about recent policy changes at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding new scientific advisory panel eligibility requirements and approval processes for EPA grants.

In October, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt followed through on his plan<sup>1</sup> to disallow EPA grantees from serving on scientific advisory panels. Scientific advisory panels, which are charged with ensuring the quality of science across the agency, provide essential insight that allows the agency to make informed decisions. Restricting the participation of science experts on these panels undermines EPA's ability to fulfill its purpose to ensure "that all Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment where they live, learn, and work." To accomplish its mission, it is imperative that the EPA receive the best available scientific counsel, which must include expert scientists drawn from industry, academia, NGOs, and government – an exchange between these groups is the best way to move forward and protect safety, health, and security.

The new policy was established in an effort to prevent scientists who receive EPA grant funding for their research from providing biased advice and furthering their own agenda. AGU finds troubling the assertion that the independence, transparency, and objectivity of the scientists who

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<sup>1</sup> "Strengthening and Improving Membership on EPA Federal Advisory Committees," Issued by EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, Environmental Protection Agency, 31 October 2017 (online at [www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-10/documents/final\\_draft\\_fac\\_directive-10.31.2017.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-10/documents/final_draft_fac_directive-10.31.2017.pdf))

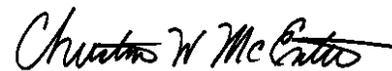
receive federal grants is compromised. The principles and practices that protect the integrity of science are well defined through the scientific method and the peer-review process. All federal grant recipients must pass thorough the merit review process, proving their high standards in professionalism and ethics. Additionally, all EPA grant applicants must formally declare that there is no conflict of interest posed by receiving such awards.

We are also troubled by EPA's new policy requiring approval of all grant solicitations<sup>2</sup> by a political appointee to confirm that it aligns with the priorities of the Administration. This procedural hurdle will only slow the award-making process and potentially prevent the best proposals from being funded by anything other than sound science.

Interference in the scientific enterprise chills American scientific ingenuity, impairs scientific careers, and reduces the efficacy of our policymakers' use of critical data to inform decisions. EPA's decisions have real implications for the health and well-being of our citizens, our communities, and our nation. Instead of curtailing the input of some of the most respected minds in science, it is imperative that the agency use the best information, including scientific resources, to protect communities from current and emerging threats to their health and well-being.

AGU appreciates the opportunity to weigh in on these issues. We look forward to working with you and ensuring that science can continue to benefit our communities across the nation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine W McEntee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Christine McEntee  
Executive Director/CEO  
American Geophysical Union

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<sup>2</sup> "EPA's new procedures for drafting competitive grant solicitations" *Washington Post*, 4 September 2017 (online at [apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/politics/epas-new-procedures-for-drafting-competitive-grant-solicitations/2537/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/politics/epas-new-procedures-for-drafting-competitive-grant-solicitations/2537/))