

Scientific Integrity in the Obama Administration

Scientific integrity has been a White House priority since Day One of the Obama Administration, as was made clear in the President's inaugural address when he made a commitment to "restore science to its rightful place." That commitment has been exemplified by the dozens of extraordinarily high-caliber and internationally renowned scientists that the President has brought into his Administration, including three Nobel prize winners in science in full-time positions (Steven Chu, Harold Varmus, and Carl Wieman) and two more as members of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (Mario Molina and Ahmed Zewail); by the policies the Administration has adopted, including the President's Executive Order removing barriers to responsible research involving stem cells; by the budgets it has proposed, as reflected by the largest investment in science and innovation in our Nation's history; and by the processes it has followed to apply science to some of our most challenging problems, including evidence-based decision-making in energy, agriculture, climate, resource management, and national security.

Additionally, on March 9, 2009, the President issued an Executive Memorandum setting forth clearly and unconditionally the fundamental principles of the Administration's stance on this subject and asking Dr. John Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, for recommendations for further Presidential action "to guarantee scientific integrity throughout the Executive Branch."

Pursuant to that request and, as specified in the Memorandum, in consultation with "the heads of executive departments and agencies," OSTP engaged in the development of such recommendations. OSTP began the process by creating an interagency working group with representatives from all of the major science offices and agencies. That group launched an unprecedentedly open, Web-based process to accept detailed input from stakeholders inside and outside of government, including scientific and professional societies, civic society and open government advocacy groups, and individual citizens. Based on that input and internal discussions, the group developed draft recommendations for consideration by OSTP and OMB.

One of the major challenges presented by the deliberative process was determining how to elaborate on the principles set forth in the Executive Memorandum in enough detail and specificity to be of real assistance in their implementation, while at the same time retaining sufficient generality to be applicable across executive departments and agencies with a wide variety of missions and structures. The final guidelines were released in a Memorandum to the Heads of Executive Agencies and Departments on December 17, 2010, and focused on four main areas: (1) strengthening the foundations of scientific integrity in government; (2) public communications; (3) use of federal advisory committees; and (4) professional development of government scientists and engineers. The Memorandum called upon department heads to develop scientific integrity policies that meet the minimum requirements spelled out in that memo and directed them to provide OSTP with progress reports within 120 days.

Since then, the Department of the Interior has released its new policy, with certain sections expected to be augmented in coming months, and other agencies are well on their way to completion. Meanwhile, OSTP is reaching out to agencies in various ways in order to help them with the development of their policies—through this workshop, for example, and on OSTP's website (www.ostp.gov).

OSTP is confident that the forthcoming policies will help ensure that science and technology continue to be brought to bear by this Administration, and by future ones, with the greatest effectiveness and integrity.

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