

The Issue at a Glance

The Bush administration disregarded the principle that scientific information should never be adjusted to fit a predetermined policy decision. Administration appointees have consistently misrepresented and suppressed scientific knowledge for political purposes and fundamentally changed the way science informs government policies. Political interference in federal government science has limited the ability of critical government agencies to make fully informed decisions on health and environmental protection.

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“Restoring the rule of scientific integrity in federal agencies will be a monumental and absolutely necessary task,” says Dr. Susan F. Wood, research professor at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services; she served as assistant commissioner for Women’s Health at the Food and Drug Administration until 2005, when she resigned on principle over the continued delay in approving emergency over-the-counter contraception. “People have to be able to trust that government decisions are being made on the basis of the best available scientific information. Otherwise, we are really at risk. UCS has not only highlighted the situation; it has kept the heat on, minimized the damage, and developed workable solutions,” says Dr. Wood.



The Challenge

The Bush administration created a pervasive level of political abuse of federal government science. Scientists have been intimidated and censored, while their research has been manipulated, suppressed and distorted. Serious consequences have resulted for critical issues ranging from childhood lead poisoning and toxic mercury emissions to climate change and air quality. Even worse, new bureaucratic rules have indefinitely sidelined science from the policy-making process and reduced public access to federal scientific information. Reversing the long-term damage done to government scientific integrity will take a huge commitment from the new president and Congress. UCS is leading the effort in Washington to put standards in place to protect the integrity of federal science.

To learn more about restoring the integrity of science, visit the Scientific Integrity section of the UCS website at www.ucsusa.org.

UCS Solutions

- » Work with Congress to explicitly extend whistle-blower protections to government scientists who report political interference in their work. Seek to strengthen existing whistle-blower laws and to reform the failed system of investigating claims of retaliation.
- » Make government more accountable by working agency by agency to ensure that federal officials take concrete steps to improve transparency, the best safeguard against corruption.
- » Seek the adoption of reforms that strike an appropriate balance between White House priorities and agency independence, setting limits on the power of political appointees to manipulate, suppress, censor, or delay the release of scientific results.
- » Ensure robust scientific input to federal decision making by advocating for reform of the federal system for appointing scientific advisory committees, ending political litmus tests, and preventing conflicts of interest from undermining the decision making of such committees.

UCS Leadership

- » UCS launched a nation-wide campaign to protect the integrity of science in public policy making. We won the attention of Congress and the national media in 2004 as the first to put political censorship and distortion of science on the public agenda.
- » 15,000 scientists signed UCS's "Scientist Statement on Scientific Integrity." They included 52 Nobel laureates, 63 National Medal of Science recipients, and 195 members of the National Academies.
- » UCS has conducted a series of surveys of scientists in federal agencies, documenting the scope of the problem and leading to congressional hearings and concrete reform. Other UCS investigative work has exposed political interference in science surrounding the Endangered Species Act.
- » UCS led a successful effort to provide the public with more information about how prescription drug approval decisions are made at the Food and Drug Administration. UCS also helped pass legislation that extends whistleblower protections to scientists at the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

