

Public statement on threats to science in the United States

A working group consisting of members of NAS, NAM, and NAE has developed the following statement to be released to the public in defense of science.

TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

We all rely on science. Science gave us the smartphones in our pockets, the navigation systems in our cars, and life-saving medical care. We count on engineers when we drive across bridges and fly in airplanes. Businesses and farmers rely on science and engineering for product innovation, technological advances, and weather forecasting. Science helps humanity protect the planet and keeps pollutants and toxins out of our air, water, and food.

For over 80 years, wise investments by the US government have built up the nation's research enterprise, making it the envy of the world. Astoundingly, the Trump administration is destabilizing this enterprise by gutting funding for research, firing thousands of scientists, removing public access to scientific data, and pressuring researchers to alter or abandon their work on ideological grounds.

The undersigned are elected members of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, representing some of the nation's top scientists, engineers, and medical researchers. We are speaking out as individuals. We see real danger in this moment. We hold diverse political beliefs, but we are united as researchers in wanting to protect independent scientific inquiry. We are sending this SOS to sound a clear warning: the nation's scientific enterprise is being decimated.

The administration is slashing funding for scientific agencies, terminating grants to scientists, defunding their laboratories, and hampering international scientific collaboration. The funding cuts are forcing institutions to pause research (including studies of new disease treatments), dismiss faculty, and stop enrolling graduate students—the pipeline for the next generation's scientists.

The administration's current investigations of more than 50 universities send a chilling message. Columbia University was recently notified that its federal funding will be withheld unless it adopts disciplinary policies and disables academic departments specified by the administration. Destabilizing dozens of universities will endanger higher education—and the research those institutions conduct.

The quest for truth—the mission of science—requires that scientists freely explore new questions and report their findings honestly, independent of special interests. The administration is engaging in censorship, destroying this independence. It is using executive orders and financial threats to manipulate which studies are funded or published, how results are reported, and which data and research findings the public can access. The administration is blocking research on topics it finds objectionable, such as climate change, or that yields results it does not like, on topics ranging from vaccine safety to economic trends.

A climate of fear has descended on the research community. Researchers, afraid of losing their funding or job security, are removing their names from publications, abandoning studies, and rewriting grant proposals and papers to remove scientifically accurate terms (such as “climate

change”) that agencies are flagging as objectionable. Although some in the scientific community have protested vocally, most researchers, universities, research institutions, and professional organizations have kept silent to avoid antagonizing the administration and jeopardizing their funding.

If our country’s research enterprise is dismantled, we will lose our scientific edge. Other countries will lead the development of novel disease treatments, clean energy sources, and the new technologies of the future. Their populations will be healthier, and their economies will surpass us in business, defense, intelligence gathering, and monitoring our planet’s health. The damage to our nation’s scientific enterprise could take decades to reverse.

We call on the administration to cease its wholesale assault on U.S. science, and we urge the public to join this call. Share this statement with others, contact your representatives in Congress, and help your community understand what is at risk. The voice of science must not be silenced. We all benefit from science, and we all stand to lose if the nation’s research enterprise is destroyed.

The views expressed here are our own and not those of the National Academies or our home institutions.

More than 1900 scientists, engineers, and health professionals have already signed the statement. Listed below are the first 60, and soon we will be posting a document with the full list of signatories.

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