

January 13, 2025

Senator John Boozman
Chair
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry

Senator Roger Wicker
Chair
Committee on Armed Services

Senator Tim Scott
Chair
Committee on Banking, Housing, & Urban
Affairs

Senator Lindsey Graham
Chair
Committee on the Budget

Senator Ted Cruz
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation

Senator Mike Lee
Chair
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Senator Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Committee on Environment & Public Works

Senator Mike Crapo
Chair
Committee on Finance

Senator James Risch
Chair
Committee on Foreign Relations

Senator Bill Cassidy
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &
Pensions

Senator Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry

Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services

Senator Elizabeth Warren
Ranking Member
Committee on Banking, Housing, & Urban
Affairs

Senator Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget

Senator Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation

Senator Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment & Public Works

Senator Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance

Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations

Senator Bernard Sanders
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &
Pensions

Senator Rand Paul
Chair
Committee on Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs

Senator Gary Peters
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Chair
Committee on Indian Affairs

Senator Brian Schatz
Vice Chair
Committee on Indian Affairs

Senator Tom Cotton
Chair
Select Committee on Intelligence

Senator Mark Warner
Vice Chair
Select Committee on Intelligence

Senator Chuck Grassley
Chair
Committee on the Judiciary

Senator Dick Durbin
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary

Senator Joni Ernst
Chair
Committee on Small Business &
Entrepreneurship

Senator Ed Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Small Business &
Entrepreneurship

Senator Jerry Moran
Chair
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Senator Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Dear Senators,

Evaluating nominees for positions of leadership in federal agencies requires anticipating how well they will carry out the missions of the agencies that Congress created years ago in the face of present-day challenges. Agency leaders must respond effectively to a variety of threats, from cyberattacks to hurricanes and pandemics. To do so, they must value science and consider evidence that can help them make well-informed decisions. Our organizations urge you to consider nominees' respect for science in confirmation hearings and votes — and in your ongoing oversight activities in the coming years. In particular, we urge you to vote against nominees who lack the necessary qualifications, have serious conflicts of interest, or fail to recognize any scientific consensus relevant to their agency.

Appointees should have the necessary qualifications to lead their agencies or programs, and should be free from conflicts of interest that would prevent them from carrying out the agencies' missions. That statement is from a 2018 report¹ endorsed by several of our organizations. The report highlighted instances of nominated and appointed agency leaders lacking appropriate credentials, which

¹ See Chapter 3 of *Protecting Science at Federal Agencies: How Congress Can Help*. (2018)
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/ucs-documents/science-and-democracy/protecting-science-at-federal-agencies.pdf>

should include relevant academic degrees and respect for the mission of the agency or program they are nominated to lead. It also described appointees who had such substantial conflicts that they could not participate in important aspects of their agencies' work when they recused themselves as ethics policies required. (Many appointees have some conflicts of interest and recuse themselves from matters involving those conflicts; however, Senators must consider the impact of repeated recusals.) In addition, if the public sees appointees potentially gaining personal profit from their agencies' actions, public trust in government — already alarmingly low² — is likely to decline further.

In addition to being free from serious conflicts of interest and having relevant qualifications, ***nominees should demonstrate that they value scientific integrity***. Scientific integrity is “the adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities”; it allows scientists to conduct their work free from political interference. It is a concept that has long had bipartisan support, as evidenced by the fact that EPA administrators from both Democratic and Republican administrations have signed statements of support for their agency's scientific integrity policy.^{3,4} As Representative Ralph Norman (R-SC) noted at a hearing on the Scientific Integrity Act in 2019, “Scientific findings are often relied upon by policymakers to make important decisions that affect the lives of millions of Americans ... to maintain the public's trust, there must be a high degree of integrity and transparency in the scientific process.”⁵

Supporting scientific integrity means ensuring that decision makers have sound data on which to base their decisions, not dictating what those decisions are. For instance, the H5N1 (bird flu) virus that has been infecting poultry and dairy herds in several states has now been found in several humans. If human-to-human spread follows, a pandemic could arise early in the new administration. In any viral pandemic, the government must be able to rely on data about how the virus spreads and the extent to which vaccines limit the spread of infections and the severity of symptoms. Scientific integrity demands that the scientists generating this information — as well as data about the likely benefits and harms of any proposed mitigation measures — be able to do their work without political interference. It does not dictate that government leaders use that information to recommend or mandate any specific measures to slow a virus's spread. Political appointees will be responsible for weighing the different considerations and deciding how their agencies will respond.

What would be disastrous for our nation — and what Senators can prevent by taking seriously their constitutional “advice and consent” responsibility — is ignoring or misrepresenting scientific evidence in order to make it appear that an appointee's preferred course of action is the clear solution. This could take the form of cherry-picking evidence based on ideology or actively advancing misinformation, with potentially deadly results. For instance, if a vaccine were developed in response to a new pandemic, as it was during the triumphant Operation Warp Speed of the first Trump administration, an agency leader might hamper vaccine uptake by emphasizing the very small proportion of vaccine recipients who suffered a side effect serious enough to require medical attention without comparing it to the far larger

² Partnership for Public Service. (2024). The State of Public Trust in Government 2024.

<https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/state-of-trust-in-government-2024/>

³ Wheeler A. (2020). Message from the Administrator: About EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy. November 12, 2020.

⁴ Regan M. (2021). Message from the Administrator: EPA's Commitment to Scientific Integrity. March 23, 2021.

⁵ Opening Statement of I&O Ranking Member Ralph Norman at Joint Subcommittee Hearing: Scientific Integrity in Federal Agencies. (2019). House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Republicans. <https://republicans-science.house.gov/2019/7/opening-statement-io-ranking-member-ralph-norman-joint-subcommittee-hearing>

number of severe illnesses averted. Or, if an agency leader were to spread a false claim about the polio vaccine having harmful side effects or being unnecessary, vaccine coverage would likely drop, outbreaks would occur, and thousands of children each year could once again suffer death and disability⁶ from this preventable disease. In addition to the terrible human toll if vaccine-preventable diseases become widespread, dropping vaccination rates threaten productivity and economic growth.⁷

We ask that you vote against the confirmation of any nominee who exhibits the following:

- 1) **The absence of necessary qualifications** — e.g., appropriate academic degree, relevant work experience, respect for the agency mission — to lead their agencies or programs.
- 2) **Conflicts of interest** that would a) make the public question whether the person is truly capable of representing the public's best interest or b) require the person to recuse themselves from substantial portions of the agency's work if they adhere to the agency ethics policy.
- 3) **A failure to recognize scientific consensus relevant to their agency.** For instance, a nominee should only be approved for a position in the Department of Health and Human Services if they acknowledge that decades of evidence show that the current childhood vaccine series is safe, effective, and responsible for the child death rate being far lower than it was in the pre-vaccine era.
- 4) **A record of disregard for scientific integrity infrastructure.** For instance, a nominee should not be approved if they have opposed efforts to strengthen scientific integrity or transparency at a company or organization.

We also recommend asking the following of nominees in confirmation hearing:

- 1) Scientific integrity is “the adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities.” Do you commit to upholding the principles of scientific integrity at your agency?
- 2) Do you commit to ensuring the scientists at your agency can conduct their work according to their fields' accepted professional practices, ethical guidelines, and standards for honesty and objectivity?
- 3) Do you commit to ensuring that the findings of scientific research conducted by your agency will be communicated accurately, and that the scientists who generated the work will have an opportunity to correct any misrepresentations of their work prior to dissemination?
- 4) Do you pledge to use the best available scientific evidence to inform decisions and evidence-based policies, and to communicate clearly and accurately with the public regarding the evidence that informed these decisions and policies?

⁶ Beaubien J. (2012). Wiping Out Polio: How The U.S. Snuffed Out A Killer. Shots: Health News from NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/10/16/162670836/wiping-out-polio-how-the-u-s-snuffed-out-a-killer>

⁷ Rodrigues CMC & Plotkin SA. (2020). Impact of Vaccines; Health, Economic and Social Perspectives. *Frontiers in Microbiology*, 11:1526. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/microbiology/articles/10.3389/fmicb.2020.01526/full>

In addition, we recommend asking about these kinds of actions and commitments as part of your oversight role. For instance, when you hold hearings with agency leaders as witnesses, we urge you to raise scientific integrity topics.

Every administration must respond to disasters and attacks that threaten our nation's health and wellbeing. The decisions you make about nominees will determine whether agencies use the substantial scientific expertise of government employees and advisors to safeguard public health and economic stability, or whether bias and misinformation block effective responses. We urge you to vote against nominees who lack the necessary qualifications, have serious conflicts of interest, or fail to recognize any scientific consensus relevant to their agency.

If you have any questions, please contact Liz Borkowski (borkowsk@gwu.edu) at the Jacobs Institute of Women's Health, George Washington University.

Sincerely,

American Bird Conservancy
American Humanist Association
Center for Food Safety
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Data and Governance Initiative
Families USA
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Greenpeace USA
Ibis Reproductive Health
Inland Ocean Coalition
International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
League of Conservation Voters
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Missouri River Bird Observatory
National Abortion Federation
National Partnership for Women & Families
Natural Resources Defense Council
People Power United
Positive Women's Network-USA
Rachel Carson Council
Sciencecorps
Sustainable Ocean Alliance
Union of Concerned Scientists
Womxn From The Mountain

CC:

Senator Angela Alsobrooks
Senator Tammy Baldwin
Senator Jim Banks
Senator John Barrasso
Senator Michael Bennet
Senator Marsha Blackburn
Senator Katie Boyd Britt
Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester
Senator Cory Booker
Senator Ted Budd
Senator Susan Collins
Senator Chris Coons
Senator John Cornyn
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto
Senator Kevin Cramer
Senator John Curtis
Senator Steve Daines
Senator Tammy Duckworth
Senator John Fetterman
Senator Deb Fischer
Senator Rubin Gallego
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Senator Bill Hagerty
Senator Maggie Hassan
Senator Josh Hawley
Senator John Hickenlooper
Senator Mazie Hirono
Senator John Hoeven
Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith
Senator Ron Johnson
Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Andy Kim
Senator Mark Kelly
Senator John Kennedy

Senator Angus King
Senator James Lankford
Senator Ben Ray Lujan
Senator Cynthia Lummis
Senator Markwayne Mullin
Senator Roger Marshall
Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator David McCormick
Senator Bernie Moreno
Senator Chris Murphy
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Jon Ossoff
Senator Alex Padilla
Senator Pete Ricketts
Senator Jacky Rosen
Senator Mike Rounds
Senator Mark Rubio
Senator Eric Schmitt
Senator Chuck Schumer
Senator Rick Scott
Senator Adam Schiff
Senator Tim Sheehy
Senator Elissa Slotkin
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Dan Sullivan
Senator John Thune
Senator Thom Tillis
Senator Tommy Tuberville
Senator Chris Van Hollen
Senator JD Vance
Senator Raphael Warnock
Senator Peter Welch
Senator Todd Young