

Advancing the Scientific Integrity Act

Why Congress Needs to Protect Federal Science from Politicization

Federal scientists do the work necessary to ensure there are safeguards that we all need and support: clean air and water, safe food and medicine, consumer products that won't harm us, and protection from extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and other damaging effects of climate change.

Congress has empowered federal agencies to conduct scientific research to inform policies and decisions that affect people across the nation. The best science-informed policies rely on a basic principle: that science is independent and impartial. Nevertheless, in documented cases dating back to at least the Eisenhower administration (Berman and Carter 2018), government officials have sidelined science for political, financial, and/or ideological reasons—often at the expense of health and safety protections, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities across the United States (Ellickson 2026).

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) documented 326 attacks on science between 2001 and 2024 (UCS 2025). From January 2025 to June 2026, UCS recorded an additional 574 attacks (Barbati-Dajches et al. 2026). The tactics that have been used by various administrations to undermine science include selective editing of public documents or data; restricting scientists' communication; appointing unqualified individuals, or individuals with conflicts of interest, to science advisory committees; reducing scientific staff capacity; and restricting funding for, or inappropriately weakening or rescinding, science-based policy solutions.

Federal agencies' scientific integrity policies have helped keep political or corporate interests from influencing scientific findings, but even strong scientific integrity policies may fall short if not followed. Despite progress on scientific integrity at agencies during previous administrations (White House 2024), the second Trump administration issued a presidential memorandum to undo important progress made to protect science, scientists, data, and findings (Barbati-Dajches 2025). Additional presidential actions purportedly taken to “restore” so-called “gold standard” science have further undermined independent science for the public good by threatening to restrict the studies federal agencies can use in policy decisions (Goldman and Barbati-Dajches 2025; Barbati-Dajches 2026b).

Scientific Integrity Prevents Special-Interest Meddling in Decisionmaking

Preventing federal scientists from providing critical scientific information to the public can endanger people's lives, especially during national emergencies. Thus, it is crucial that Congress codify scientific integrity into law and require all agencies to implement and enforce those laws. A commitment to science should underpin all related policies, governing such processes as peer review, conflict-of-interest disclosures, transparency in decisionmaking, public access to government science, scientific free speech, and the right of federal scientists to study issues, share research, express personal views, and report abuses without fear of retaliation.

Ensuring federally funded science is protected from political interference helps protect the United States' economy, global standing, and ability to innovate. Businesses need confidence that they can trust federal data, investors need confidence in emerging technologies, and researchers need assurance that they can pursue the truth without fear of retaliation (Reed 2025). Added confidence in federal research would generate more innovation from scientists, strengthening the economy.

Safeguarding scientific integrity also ensures more equitable decisionmaking. When government science is sidelined, the resulting decisions are less likely to meaningfully address real issues and benefit the public—especially underserved communities that are already facing the cumulative impacts from a wide range of environmental, health, and socioeconomic factors that are likely to worsen in a warming climate (Minovi et al. 2025; Barbati-Dajches 2026a). Codifying scientific integrity would help build trust in agencies that make decisions about our health and environmental safety, products children use, and the quality of the food we consume.

The Scientific Integrity Act

The Scientific Integrity Act (H.R. 1106/S. 4545), introduced in the House by Representative Paul Tonko and in the Senate by Senator Brian Schatz, is designed to ensure that agencies use robust and independent science in their decisionmaking processes, and that federal science and scientists are properly protected from inappropriate political influence in current and future presidential administrations. The act would codify, at the national level, the strongest protections for federal scientists and their work we have ever seen in modern history. Specifically, it would require federal agencies that fund or direct public science to establish and maintain clear scientific integrity principles. The act also clarifies that science should determine policy, free from political interference, ideology, or financial conflicts of interest. Lastly, the bill holds public scientists to the highest standards while guaranteeing their rights and protections under the law.

Science is at the very heart of how federal agencies keep our food and medicine safe, protect us from emerging diseases, and combat the effects of climate change, among other things. Passing the Scientific Integrity Act will help protect federal science from political interference that can endanger our safety and livelihoods.

Please contact your member of Congress at (202) 224-3121 and urge them to cosponsor the Scientific Integrity Act. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Van Theemsche at lvanteemsche@ucs.org.

Note: This document was updated on June 30, 2026 to reflect the introduction of S. 4545 in the US Senate.

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