

## United States Senate

August 21, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

I was disappointed to learn about the Environmental Protection Agency's new directive for reviewing research grant solicitations.<sup>1</sup> The EPA memo released last week indicated that final grant reviews will be made by the Office of Public Affairs, with the final decision coming from Mr. John Konkus. EPA grant solicitations are highly technical, complex scientific proposals developed by some of the country's top scientists. While I do believe that political appointees can serve important leadership roles in federal agencies, I fail to understand the beneficial role a political appointee, without any meaningful scientific background, could have in the grant review process. Furthermore, I believe the new process is in direct conflict with the agency's own Scientific Integrity Policy.<sup>2</sup>

The EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy, along with similar policies adopted by 28 federal agencies, sets noncontroversial and commonsense standards to preserve the objective science that is the backbone of the agency. Among many important guidelines, the agency's Scientific Integrity Policy affirms the expectation that all agency employees, including scientists, managers, and political appointees, regardless of grade level, position, or duties shall: "ensure that the agency's scientific work is of the highest quality, free from political interference or personal motivations" and "welcome differing views and opinions on scientific and technical matters as a legitimate and necessary part of the scientific process." The new directive for grant solicitations is in clear violation of these important pillars of scientific integrity and of commonsense.

In response to questions about the new policy and the qualifications of Mr. Konkus to review scientific proposals, the agency issued a statement indicating that goal of the new policy is to ensure that grants adhere to the Trump Administration's goals and policies. I hope you agree that transparency and scientific integrity should remain at the core of EPA-funded research and the agency's decision-making processes. The lack of transparency in the issued directive on grant reviews is alarming, especially considering that no rationale was provided for the decision. The statement accompanying the directive only confirmed my concerns that the new grant review policy is simply a means to advance the administration's political agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eenews.net/assets/2017/08/17/document\\_gw\\_10.pdf](https://www.eenews.net/assets/2017/08/17/document_gw_10.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific\\_integrity\\_policy\\_2012.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf)

In a recent interview<sup>3</sup>, you stated that “science should not be politicized.” I hope you can recognize the contradiction between this belief and your directive on grant solicitations. For these reasons I urge you to reinstate the previous administration’s grant review process—one that was squarely in line with the agency’s Scientific Integrity Policy and evaluated grant proposals based only on merit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Schatz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and the last name "Schatz" clearly legible.

Brian Schatz  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/11/pruitt-climate-report-epa-241546>