Government Accountability Project and the Climate Science Legal Defense Fund Launch the Scientific Integrity Reporting Project

WASHINGTON—Today, Government Accountability Project and the Climate Science Legal Defense Fund (CSLDF), in partnership with the American Geophysical Union (AGU), the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative (EDGI), the Jacobs Institute of Women's Health, and Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), are coming together to launch the Scientific Integrity Reporting Project: an initiative aimed at documenting past and ongoing threats to scientific integrity to ensure that science can contribute to evidenced-based policymaking without the influence of partisan politics.

Threats to scientific integrity escalated during the Trump administration, but it was far from the first time scientists faced political interference. The politicization of science undermines public trust in critical scientific institutions and can have devastating consequences for public health and safety. These violations of scientific integrity also contribute to poor morale and make it more difficult for affected institutions to recruit and retain talented scientists.

As the Biden administration via the Office of Science and Technology Policy takes laudable steps to assess the weaknesses of agency scientific integrity policies; the Scientific Integrity Reporting Project aims to provide value-added insights and complement the processes underway. Federal employees may not be comfortable reporting their experiences internally, and grantees, contractors, and others employed outside the federal government must also be included to uncover a broader range of scientific integrity violations. Importantly, the current efforts appear to be time-limited to the Trump and Obama administrations, whereas it is critical to understand both long-term and current trends and issues. This project will address all these needs.

Through the Scientific Integrity Reporting Project, government scientists and those in science-adjacent positions, such as grant officers or communications personnel, who may have experienced threats to scientific integrity can contribute their stories in the interest of preventing inappropriate interference in science in the future. The project invites members of the scientific community from all disciplines to report their stories – with the option to do so anonymously – through secure and confidential channels. Experts at Government Accountability Project and Climate Science Legal Defense Fund, with support from advisory partners AGU, EDGI, the Jacobs Institute for Women's Health, and UCS, which have diverse issue-area expertise and longstanding commitments to promoting scientific integrity, will use these examples to produce a report to inform policymakers at federal and state agencies, universities, and other research institutions about how to make science more resilient to future threats. Attorneys from Government Accountability Project and CSLDF will also be available to provide legal advice and potential representation to those who contact us.

Government Accountability Project Executive Director and CEO Louis Clark commented:

“For decades we have supported employees of conscience who defended scientific integrity by speaking up, often at great professional risk, about problems ranging from suppression of information about unsafe nuclear projects to censorship of climate science reports to, most
recently, the purveying of bogus, dangerous information about COVID-19 treatments just this past year. We know that reports from employees about violations of scientific integrity can truly make a difference in not only addressing the problems they disclose, but strengthening the rights of others to stand up for science in the future. This project will allow federal employees, grantees and contractors to similarly share their stories but in a way that is safe and confidential, in chorus with others who understand that scientific integrity is essential to the public policies and practices that affect all of us.”

Climate Science Legal Defense Fund Executive Director Lauren Kurtz commented:

“Federal science needs to be protected from censorship, intimidation, and misrepresentation. The Biden administration is now taking a long-overdue look at strengthening agency scientific integrity policies, in the wake of many published reports of political interference in science during the last few years. We believe that an even larger number of important stories remain untold, from every administration. By participating in this project and sharing their experiences, scientists, as well as others whose work relates to research, can help us learn from these accounts, add to current reform efforts, and ensure that science is safeguarded in the future.”

Environmental Data and Governance Initiative’s Christopher Sellers commented:

“Headlines over the last four years have highlighted the shocking vulnerability of federal scientists to a political leadership intent on distorting or suppressing the truths they bring. While the greatest threats now appear to have lifted, there may well be a next time. To prepare for that, we need to get to the bottom of what happened over the last Administration and why, then to develop measures for protecting scientific integrity that are more up to the task. That is precisely what this new Scientific Integrity Reporting Project will do, and we at EDGI are excited to join with the Climate Legal Defense Fund, the Government Accountability Project, and other partners in launching it.”

Jacobs Institute of Women’s Health Executive Director Susan F. Wood, PhD commented:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how essential it is for the public to be able to trust the agencies that approve drugs and vaccines, issue public health guidance, and ensure that everyone can access the healthcare they need. Learning from those who witness concerning actions before and during the pandemic will better equip us to respond to ongoing and future public health challenges.”

Director of The Center for Science and Democracy at Union of Concerned Scientists Dr. Andrew Rosenberg commented:

“Scientific Integrity means policy makers and the public get their information about scientific evidence directly from the scientists themselves without political manipulation. That’s critical for public health, safety, and the environment. But it requires holding government consistently accountable. That’s what public scrutiny ensures.”
To learn more about the Scientific Integrity Reporting Project, visit its website [here].

**Contact:** Andrew Harman, Government Accountability Project Communications Director  
**Email:** andrewh@whistleblower.org  
**Phone:** 202.926.3304

**Contact:** Tiffany Challe, Climate Science Legal Defense Fund, Communications Coordinator  
**Email:** press@csldf.org  
**Phone:** 914-434-8975

*Government Accountability Project is the nation’s leading whistleblower protection organization. Through litigating whistleblower cases, publicizing concerns and developing legal reforms, Government Accountability Project’s mission is to protect the public interest by promoting government and corporate accountability. Founded in 1977, Government Accountability Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C.*

*The Climate Science Legal Defense Fund (CSLDF) protects the scientific endeavor by preserving and expanding scientists’ rights and strengthening the legal protections that promote scientific integrity. A non-profit, nonpartisan group founded in 2011, CSLDF remains the only organization in the United States that provides free legal representation, advice, and education to government and academic researchers targeted by efforts to undermine the science needed to address climate change and other pressing environmental problems.*

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