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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

February 27, 2015

RYAN JACKSON, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
BETTINA POIRIER, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

Robert A. Altenkirch  
President  
The University of Alabama in Huntsville  
Shelbie King Hall, Room 374  
Huntsville, AL 35899

Dear President Altenkirch:

We write in regards to the recent request for information on your support of scientific research initiated by several of our colleagues in the United States Congress. At the outset, we are deeply concerned the letter calls into question the importance of scientific discovery and academic freedom. Rather than empower scientists and researchers to expand the public discourse on climate science and other environmental topics, the letter could be viewed as an attempt to silence legitimate intellectual and scientific inquiry.

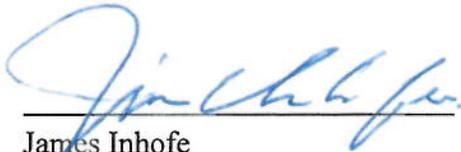
Federal government-sponsored research is good and necessary, but such funding has limits. The federal government does not have a monopoly on funding high-quality scientific research, and many of the nation's environmental laws require decisions be based on the best scientific information available—not just federally funded research. At the core of American ingenuity are those researchers who challenge the status quo whether in matters of climate, economics, medicine, or any field of study. Institutions of higher-learning and non-governmental funding are vital to facilitating such research and scientific inquiry. Limiting research and science to only those who receive federal government resources would undermine and slow American education, economic prosperity, and technological advancement.

The credibility of a scientific finding, research paper, report, or advancement should be weighed on its compliance with the scientific method and ability to meet the principles of sound science; in short, it should be weighed on its merits. The scientific method is a process marked by skepticism and testing, rather than dogma. If the work can be reproduced and independent experts have a fair chance to validate the findings then it is sound, irrespective of funding sources. Science the federal government uses to support regulatory decisions should also comply with the integrity, quality, and transparency requirements under the Information Quality Act and Office of Management and Budget Guidelines.

Indeed, science is only one criterion we must take into consideration when developing laws and regulations. Credible deliberation requires thoughtful analysis and an understanding of the economy, policy, and legal framework in which we function. Dissenting opinions fostered through the encouragement of all ideas is what truly facilitates intellectual prosperity and political discourse.

The letter you received from our colleagues is a wholly inappropriate effort to challenge these well-accepted truths. We ask you to not be afraid of political repercussions or public attacks regardless of how you respond. Above all, we ask that you continue to support scientific inquiry and discovery, and protect academic freedom despite efforts to chill free speech.

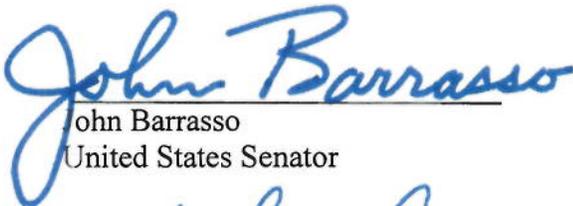
Sincerely,



James Inhofe  
Chairman



David Vitter  
United States Senator



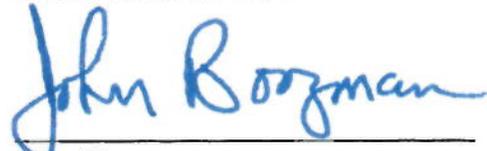
John Barrasso  
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator



Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



John Boozman  
United States Senator



Jeff Sessions  
United States Senator



Rodger F. Wicker  
United States Senator



Deb Fischer  
United States Senator



Mike Rounds  
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Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator