

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6371
<http://science.house.gov>

April 21, 2026

Dr. Marcia McNutt
President
The National Academies of Sciences,
Engineering, and Medicine
500 Fifth St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Dr. McNutt,

We write to express our concerns about potential conflicts of interest between nonprofit groups and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) Committee on Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and Their Impacts (“the Attribution Committee”). Publicly available information suggests a troubling pattern in which members of the Attribution Committee, who lead NASEM’s review of the alleged human causes of climate change, are affiliated with nonprofits that support climate accountability lawsuits, raising the appearance of impropriety and member bias.¹ The Committee is responsible for ensuring that taxpayer-funded and government sponsored science is objective, transparent, and free from conflicts that could compromise its integrity. However, the Attribution Committee members’ relationships with these nonprofit groups raise questions about NASEM’s adherence to its policies on objectivity, conflicts of interest, and committee composition.²

In 2016, NASEMEM published a report entitled *Attribution of Extreme Weather Events in the Context of Climate Change* (“the 2016 report”), which sought to “tease out the influence of

¹ Roger Pielke Jr., *Attribution: Stealth Advocacy at the NASEM*, Am. Enter. Inst. (AEI), <https://www.aei.org/articles/attribution-stealth-advocacy-at-the-NASEM/> (Mar. 12, 2026).

² See *Report of the Treasurer: For the Year Ended December 31, 2024*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/download/29218> (showing that around 85% of NASEM’s funding is derived from government sources).

human-caused climate change ... as contributors to individual extreme [weather] events.”³ Seeking to “update and expand” upon the 2016 report, NASEM established the Attribution Committee in 2024 as an “ad hoc” committee to “examine the science of attribution of specific extreme weather events to human-caused climate change and natural variability.”⁴

Members’ connections with nonprofit groups that fund and benefit from climate accountability lawsuits give the appearance of impropriety.⁵ It raises questions about the members’ objectivity and the integrity of the work that they produce. These connections also raise broader questions about the efficacy of NASEM’s conflict of interest and committee composition policies, which appear to have been relaxed on January 30, 2025.⁶ According to NASEM’s *Policy on Composition and Balance, Conflicts of Interest, and Independence for Committees*, which is required by federal law, financial conflicts can disqualify a committee member.⁷ However, professional, political, and legal conflicts cannot.⁸ Instead, such conflicts

³ *Extreme Weather Events and Climate Change Attribution*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/extreme-weather-events-and-climate-change-attribution#sectionSponsors>.

⁴ *Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and their Impacts*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/attribution-of-extreme-weather-and-climate-events-and-their-impacts#sectionCommittee>.

⁵ Dr. Joyce Kimutai, a meteorologist with Kenya Meteorological Services, is a researcher for the World Weather Attribution Consortium, which produces attribution studies frequently cited in relevant litigation; and participated in a judicial education program sponsored by the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, which provides various types of support for plaintiffs in climate accountability lawsuits. *See supra* at 3; *see e.g.*, *County of Multnomah v. Exxon Mobil Corp.*, No. 23CV01213 (Or. Cir. Ct. filed June 22, 2023). Jessica Wentz, *Conference Report: Attribution Science and Climate*, Columbia L. School (Mar. 2025), https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=sabin_climate_change; *The Climate Litigation Database*, Columbia Climate School (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.climatecasechart.com/>.

Dr. Kevin Reed, Associate Provost for Climate and Sustainability Programming at Stony Brook University, has received speaking awards from the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) for participating as an educator for judges in its Judicial Leaders in Climate Science Program. ELI’s teaching materials frequently cite NASEM’s 2016 report. *See supra* at 3; *Climate Judiciary Project* (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://cjp.eli.org/> (ELI runs CJP); *2022 Year in Review*, Climate Judiciary Project (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://cjp.eli.org/news/230401-2022-year-review> (“Several of the nation’s leading climate scientists and legal scholars acted as faculty, including ... Kevin Reed”). *See e.g.*, Katharine Mach, *The Impacts of Climate Change*, Climate Judiciary Project (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://cjp.eli.org/curriculum/impacts-climate-change>.

⁶ *Policy on Composition and Balance, Conflicts of Interest, and Independence for Committees Used in the Development of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/documents/embed/link/LF2255DA3DD1C41C0A42D3BEF0989ACAECE3053A6A9B/file/D4D336B1CB9047B19928EA8785ED2E43C913B841539A?noSaveAs=1>.

⁷ *See* Federal Advisory Committee Act Amendments of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-153, 111 Stat. 2689 (1997); *See also* Jessica Wentz, *Conference Report: Attribution Science and Climate*, COLUMBIA L. SCHOOL (Mar. 2025), https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=sabin_climate_change; *The Climate Litigation Database*, COLUMBIA CLIMATE SCHOOL (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.climatecasechart.com/>

⁸ *See* Jessica Wentz, *Conference Report: Attribution Science and Climate*, COLUMBIA L. SCHOOL (Mar. 2025), https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1246&context=sabin_climate_change; *The*

need only be disclosed, with no protocol for mitigation.⁹ The integrity concerns surrounding the Attribution Committee are reinforced by a related scandal directly involving NASEM: the climate science chapter of the Federal Judicial Center's *Reference Manual on Scientific Evidence*, which was co-published by NASEM, was recently retracted after it was revealed to contain substantial unattributed contributions from Michael Burger, executive director of Columbia's Sabin Center for Climate Change Law and of counsel at Sher Edling, a plaintiffs' firm actively litigating climate accountability lawsuits against fossil fuel companies.¹⁰ The same category of conflicts of interest that now raise questions about the Attribution Committee's independence and objectivity.¹¹

Additionally, regarding committee composition and balance, NASEM's policy requires that "[c]onsideration be given to whether there is an appropriate range of perspectives on the issues to be addressed by the committee. Differing and new perspectives ... [are] vital."¹² The same policy requires that "[c]onsideration should be given to whether the committee membership can be objective and open-minded in addressing the issues before it."¹³ While "strongly held views or biases," or even close associations with groups that have taken strong positions, do not preclude membership, members are expected to be "open to new learning."¹⁴ The Attribution Committee members' extensive involvement in climate accountability litigation—whether through judicial education programs, amicus briefs, or affiliations with organizations funding plaintiffs—calls into question their ability to meet this standard.¹⁵

The Attribution Committee's composition and potential conflicts of interest may be better addressed through oversight mechanisms similar to those found in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). FACA requires that advisory committees be "fairly balanced in terms of the points of view represented," and mandates public notice of meetings, open sessions, and accessible records of deliberations.¹⁶ These provisions help ensure that diverse scientific perspectives are represented, that the public can observe committee work, and that the basis for conclusions is subject to scrutiny. FACA's detailed conflict of interest provisions and requirements for committee membership disclosures also enable oversight of professional relationships and affiliations that may influence members' judgments. While NASEM

Climate Litigation Database, COLUMBIA CLIMATE SCHOOL (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.climatecasechart.com/>

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *A Judicial Climate Science Scandal*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Mar. 13, 2026), <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/federal-judicial-center-climate-manual-michael-burger-jessica-wentz-marcia-mcnutt>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ See *supra* note 5.

¹⁶ 5 U.S.C. §§ 1001–1014.

committees are currently exempt from FACA, similar standards applied to the Attribution Committee could help ensure that its work product—which will likely influence significant litigation and policy decisions—reflects independent and balanced scientific inquiry.

To assess the effectiveness of NASEM's conflicts of interest and composition policies and to ensure the proper stewardship of taxpayer dollars, we ask that you retain all relevant records and respond to the following questions, in numbered order, by May 8, 2026. Further, please see the document request form below and respond with all relevant documents. Please see attachment A of this letter, which provides guidance on document production.

1. Please provide the immediately preceding official version of NASEM's conflicts of interest, balance, and composition policy (prior to January 30, 2025).
2. Please provide a copy of each official version of NASEM's conflicts of interest, balance, and composition policy since January 2017.
3. Please provide all records relating to the establishment and membership selection of the Attribution Committee.
4. Please preserve all documentation, official and unofficial, that evaluates compliance with the range-of-perspectives requirement or otherwise examines the Attribution Committee's range of perspectives.
5. Please provide documentation of NASEM's relevant policies and procedures regarding sponsor influence over committee members and their work.
6. Why were NASEM's conflicts of interest, balance, and composition policies changed on January 30, 2025?
 - a. How specifically does the January 30 policy differ from the immediately preceding version?
 - b. How many times has NASEM changed this policy since January 2017?
 - c. What is the process for amending this policy?

7. NASEM’s balance and composition policy states that “[c]onsideration be given to whether there is an appropriate range of perspectives on the issues to be addressed by the committee.”¹⁷ How is NASEM in compliance with this policy?
 - a. How was this requirement implemented in the assembly of the Attribution Committee?
 - b. What is the range of scientific perspectives with respect to the continuing debate on attribution science currently represented on the Attribution Committee?
8. NASEM’s relevant policy states that “[c]onsideration should be given to whether the committee membership can be objective and open-minded in addressing the issues before it.”¹⁸
 - a. What efforts are being taken to ensure compliance with this policy?
 - b. How was this requirement implemented in the assembly of the Attribution Committee?
 - c. How does NASEM determine whether a potentially biased committee member is “open to new learning” to counteract potential biases?
 - d. What criteria are used to determine whether such a committee member is “open to new learning”?
9. Why do financial conflicts of interest require disqualification, but non-financial conflicts do not require such treatment?
10. The Attribution Committee’s private sponsors, including the Bezos Earth Fund and the Heising-Simons Foundation, among others, are known for their progressive environmental leanings.¹⁹ How does NASEM ensure that sponsors such as these do not assert undue influence over Committee members and their work?
11. Why are the vast majority of Attribution Committee meetings closed to the public?²⁰

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ See *Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and their Impacts*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/attribution-of-extreme-weather-and-climate-events-and-their-impacts#sectionSponsors>; *Bezos Earth Fund*, INFLUENCE WATCH (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/bezos-earth-fund/> (describing the Fund as “left-of-center”); *Heising-Simons Foundation*, INFLUENCE WATCH (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/heising-simons-foundation/> (describing the Foundation as led by “major Democratic Party donors”).

²⁰ See *Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and their Impacts*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/attribution-of-extreme-weather-and-climate-events-and-their-impacts#sectionPastEvents> (showing that four of 36 Attribution Committee meetings to date were open to the public).

- a. How does this conform to NASEM’s second governing principle of transparency, which claims that “[d]ocumenting the state of knowledge is core to the scientific process. Transparency about our current and past work is essential to maintaining our credibility.”?²¹
- b. What criteria are used for determining whether meetings are open or closed to the public?

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working collaboratively to ensure the full objectivity, transparency, and impartiality of NASEM’s work. The Committee has long benefited from the advice provided by NASEM, and our intent is to ensure that Congress, the Executive Branch, and the American people continue to benefit from it in the future. If you have any questions, please contact Michael Piquero of the Committee’s majority staff at (202) 225-6371.

Sincerely,



Brian Babin
Chairman
House Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology



Rich McCormick
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Investigations and Oversight
House Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology



Scott Franklin
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Environment
House Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology

²¹ *Principles and Practices that Guide Our Work*, NAT’L ACADEMIES (last accessed Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/about/principles-and-practices-that-guide-our-work>.

cc: Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology;
Emelia Sykes, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, House
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology; Gabe Amo, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Environment, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology