



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

For Immediate Release
September 21, 2016

Media Contact: Kristina Baum
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Barry Loudermilk (R-Ga.)
Examining Misconduct and Intimidation of Scientists by Senior DOE Officials

Chairman Loudermilk: Good morning and welcome to today's Oversight and Energy Subcommittee hearing examining the intimidation of scientists at the Department of Energy.

Congressional oversight and authority to access information is a constitutional authority granted to Congress. Without open dialogue with the federal agencies, Congress cannot gather the information needed to effectively legislate. Today, we will examine a clear case of this Committee's request for information directly related to the legislative process, and the Executive branch's actions to block Congressional access to federally funded research.

Unfortunately, what we will learn at today's hearing is not an isolated incident.

It fits a pattern of intentional misinformation from Obama Administration officials, ranging from FDIC to NIST to EPA – and now the Department of Energy (DOE). While today's hearing is disturbing in many ways, I am most concerned with this incident because it appears that unelected DOE officials sought retribution against a DOE scientist simply for respecting the Constitutional authority of Congress in order to advance political priorities.

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is the authorizing committee for scientific research and development. In order to fully inform the legislative process, Committee staff must be able to engage in open discussions with federal researchers to fully understand the scope and value of existing programs. In fact, this open dialogue is protected in each annual appropriations act we pass in the House.

Federal law prohibits department and agency officials from stifling communications with Congress and penalizes those who seek to silence federal employees by prohibiting the payment of their salaries by the U.S. Treasury. I would request unanimous consent that this provision of law be included in the record.

Transparency from executive agencies is necessary to ensure Congress' ability to carry out our oversight and legislative responsibilities effectively. In this case, communications with DOE are central to the Committee's oversight of the accountable use of taxpayer funds in scientific research. Sadly, it appears that politics

has disrupted this important dialogue between Congress and the Department of Energy, and derailed important scientific research in the process.

When DOE decided it wanted to redirect funds to support President Obama's Climate Action Plan, the Department sacrificed the Low Dose Radiation Research program to achieve this goal.

This program is the federal government's only program to investigate whether the types of radiation received by Americans every day are dangerous. This research is vital to understanding radiation doses to patients undergoing CT scans or PET scans, or the hazards of radiation to workers in the nuclear industry.

The Low Dose program is also crucial to understanding the effects of a dirty bomb or nuclear accident on potential victims, so is a key research program to protecting our homeland. This is clearly science in the national interest.

But when this Committee took steps to specifically authorize this important research, DOE pushed back. When Dr. Noel Metting, the DOE scientist in charge of this program, provided honest input on the merits of the Low Dose program, she was subsequently fired by DOE senior management. All for the "crime" of working to conduct what is clearly important research, and explaining that research to Congressional staff.

I want to make absolutely clear that Congress is not directing the technical experts how to specifically carry out research. Instead, Congress decides the broad priorities and policy goals, and makes sure that taxpayer funds are spent responsibly on research with the greatest potential, while DOE carries out research at Congressional direction. It is disappointing that DOE's senior management would attempt to usurp this process, and silence a federal researcher to advance political goals – in violation of appropriations law.

This Administration's bullying and intimidation must stop. I hope that at today's hearing we will get to the bottom of the intimidation, deception and misinformation conducted by DOE officials for political priorities.

###