

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375
www.science.house.gov

April 20, 2021

Mr. Kei Koizumi
Acting Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Acting Director Koizumi:

As Ranking Member of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, I write to express my concern and seek more information regarding the Biden Administration's abrupt change in leadership of the U.S. National Climate Assessment.

Dr. Elizabeth "Betsy" Weatherhead was appointed as Director of the Fifth National Climate Assessment in November of 2020.¹ Her previous experience in climatology includes a nearly 25-year academic career at the University of Colorado, working as a senior scientist for a private sector company advising businesses and governments on preparing for climate change, and serving on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Science Advisory Board.² She also contributed to multiple Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, including the 2007 report for which she shared a Nobel Peace Prize for her work on Arctic climate, and has collaborated with many federal agencies during her academic career. She is widely recognized as an expert in atmospheric science, including by NASA's current Acting Senior Climate Advisor.³ Her selection to this position garnered praise from members of the scientific community, including those who have served Democratic Administrations.⁴

According to *The Washington Post*, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) has reassigned Dr. Weatherhead and removed her from this position.⁵ No official communication has been received from your office regarding this abrupt change or the reasoning behind it.

¹ Jason Samenow and Andrew Freedman, *Trump administration taps mainstream climate scientist to run key climate review*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Nov. 4, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2020/11/04/national-climate-assessment-director/>.

² Jason Samenow, *White House removes scientist picked by Trump official to lead key climate report*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Apr. 18, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/04/18/betsy-weatherhead-removed-white-house/>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Samenow and Freedman, *supra* note 1.

⁵ Samenow, *supra* note 2.

It is especially disturbing given that media reports indicate that Dr. Weatherhead has emphasized the value of incorporating diverse viewpoints reflecting a variety of perspectives in the National Climate Assessment, and the federal officials involved with the report took issue with this and her desire to include additional authors.⁶

Despite President Biden's statement in the Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis that "...the Federal Government must be guided by the best science and be protected by processes that ensure the integrity of Federal decision-making,"⁷ this decision suggests that scientific advisors and civil service scientists are being evaluated based on the fact they were appointed or hired during the previous Administration, rather than on their credentials and experience.

Additionally, rejecting additional perspectives that may not support a desired conclusion and politicizing leadership roles does not contribute to embracing "the best science" and erodes "the integrity of Federal decision-making."

This action appears to undermine the credibility of the U.S. Global Change Research Program, the National Climate Assessment, and all federally sponsored research. As my colleague, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson stated in the past, "...it is vitally important that this Assessment and all Federal climate research be free from political interference and bias."⁸ Yet it is difficult to think of a more clear example of political interference and bias than this leadership change.

As you know, the National Climate Assessment is a statutorily mandated quadrennial assessment that analyzes the effects of climate change and projects future trends.⁹ With the next report due in 2022, the removal of Dr. Weatherhead for political reasons not only instills public distrust, but also potentially delays a report that is essential for Congress in making informed environmental policy decisions.

In order to better understand the Administration's decision to remove the Director of the National Climate Assessment, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than, May 4, 2021:

- (1) All documents and communications from January 20, 2021 to present, referring or relating to current and former leadership of the U.S. Global Change Research Program and the National Climate Assessment, including Dr. Betsy Weatherhead.

⁶ Samenow, *supra* note 2.

⁷ Executive Order 13990, 86 Fed. Reg. 7037 (Jan. 20, 2021).

⁸ Committee on Science, Space, & Technology, *Chairwoman Johnson Questions Removal of Dr. Kuperberg from National Climate Assessment Panel* (Nov. 10, 2020), <https://science.house.gov/news/press-releases/chairwoman-johnson-questions-removal-of-dr-kuperberg-from-national-climate-assessment-panel->

⁹ Global Change Research Act of 1990 § 106, 15 U.S.C. § 2936, <https://www.globalchange.gov/nca5>.

Acting Director Koizumi
April 20, 2021
Page 3

- (2) All documents and communications between OSTP Deputy Director for Climate and Environment Dr. Jane Lubchenco and any outside persons or organizations from January 20, 2021 to present, referring or relating to the National Climate Assessment.
- (3) All documents and communications between OSTP and White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy from January 20, 2021 to present, referring or relating to the National Climate Assessment; and

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Daniel Dziadon with the Committee minority staff at 202-225-6371. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rep. Frank D. Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science,
Space, and Technology

cc: Dr. Eric S. Lander, Director Nominee, Office of Science and Technology Policy.
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chair, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.