



Association of American Geographers

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Douglas Richardson

August 12, 2005

The Honorable Joe L. Barton
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6115

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), I am writing to convey our concern about your Committee's June 23 letters to scientists Michael Mann, Malcolm Hughes, and Raymond Bradley, which requested very detailed information and asked specific questions about these individuals' research in the field of climate science.

As has been noted time and again, it is certainly appropriate for Congress to examine scientific issues that impact the public policy process. Nonetheless, as House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert asserted in his July 14 letter to you on this issue, your unprecedented approach "raises the specter of politicians opening investigations against any scientist who reaches a conclusion" that riles those in power, and is not the appropriate method of resolving a matter of scientific dispute.

Therefore, we join our colleagues in the scientific community, including American Association for the Advancement of Science CEO Alan Leshner and National Academy of Sciences President Ralph Cicerone, in calling on you to reconsider your approach. As Chairman Boehlert noted, appropriate methods for Congressional review include balanced hearings, briefings with scientists, and requests for reviews by the National Academy of Sciences or other expert bodies. We applaud the Academy for offering to create an independent expert panel, operating under rigorous study processes, to assess the state of scientific knowledge in the climate field and we encourage you to move your inquiry in this direction.

As former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has asserted constantly over the last several years, Federal spending on scientific research is critical to America's standing as the world's superpower. Equally critical to maintaining a robust scientific enterprise, however, is ensuring that peer review retains support as the process by which scientific findings on topics relevant to public policy are generated and used. Please let me know if we at the AAG can be of any assistance to your Committee.

Sincerely,

Douglas Richardson, Ph.D.
Executive Director