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8 August 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Barton:

We are the Presidents of the two US societies whose more than 50,000 members include most scientists engaged in climate research. However, we write today not primarily about climate research, but about the deleterious effects your requests to Drs. Mann, Hughes, and Bradley, and the National Science Foundation could have on the quality of science and its utility to you in the public policy process.

To formulate sound policy, your committee needs the best scientific information available. We recognize the responsibility of our community to provide you and other public policy makers as clear a picture as possible of the science that is relevant to your interests and appreciate every opportunity to do so. You should understand, however, that scientific information is only as good as the current state of our knowledge. Science advances when hypotheses backed by data, observations, and modeling are published. Scientific peers over time dispute, modify or ornament these hypotheses. Thus knowledge grows to the point that the original hypothesis may lead to a new theory or be consigned to the much larger trash heap of discredited ideas. Scientific papers appearing in our journals are subject to rigorous scrutiny by scientific peers prior to acceptance and subsequently by the scientific community as a whole. The science that will inform is that which has passed the peer review process and has withstood the test of time. It is this accumulated body of science rather than any individual paper that should be the basis of policymaking. There are almost always divergent views and weighing these is frequently very difficult. We ask that Congress respect this time-tested process of scientific quality control and vigorously support the resolution of these divergent scientific views in the peer reviewed literature.

In contrast, the request of your committee for massive documentation from a few scientists about a small aspect of their work has been viewed by many as more intimidating than constructive. Your request has also been interpreted as an attack on particular scientific results. The prospect for scientists of defending unpopular results in a political arena rather than before their "peers" in the literature has the potential to undermine the scientific process and, if persistent, to produce tainted results.

The American public has a right to expect that Congress and the scientific community will work effectively together on important national problems. Scientists are prepared to play their role by conducting research and making results available to all parties interested in the issue.

Policymakers, in turn, should not expect science or scientists to dictate specific policy solutions. Mutual respect by scientists and policymakers for each other's roles is critical to sound policy and to advances in science that inform the policymaking process.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and other Members of Congress to these ends.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Orcutt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. John Orcutt  
President, American Geophysical Union  
2000 Florida Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20009

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Lyons", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Walter Lyons  
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45 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02108

Cc: The Honorable John Dingell  
The Honorable Bart Stupak  
The Honorable Edward Whitfield