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Opinion

Editorial: Abuse of power

Congressman rasses scientists

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U.S. Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, represents the worst of an anti-science attitude in a lobby-dominated Congress.

Barton worked in the oil industry before he was elected to Congress in 1984, is consistently among the top five recipients of oil industry campaign contributions and openly caters to oil industry interests.

Worst has been his attack on scientists who study climate change.

Barton has launched a full-fledged investigation of three climate scientists who study the temperature history of the Earth. Their sin? They published papers concluding that Northern Hemisphere temperatures in the last decades of the 20th century were the warmest in 1,000 years.

Fortunately, at least one Republican congressman is willing to stand up to Barton. That is Rep. Sherwood Boehlert of New York, chairman of the House Committee on Science. He recently called Barton's investigation of climate scientists "misguided and illegitimate."

Boehlert notes that Barton's investigation is unprecedented and unnecessary to gain access to scientific data or balanced information on the scientific debate



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about climate change. "The only conceivable explanation for the investigation," Boehlert observes, "is to attempt to intimidate a prominent scientist and to have Congress put its thumbs on the scales of a scientific debate."

Scientific research about climate change is constantly evolving. Data and conclusions get challenged all the time in the scientific literature. The data of the scientists targeted by Barton are on public Web sites, freely available to all researchers to access and draw their own conclusions.

Barton apparently is using criticisms from Stephen McIntyre, a mining industry executive with no formal training in climate research, and Ross McKittrick, an economist with no scientific training, as the excuse for investigating climate change scientists. Boehlert asks the right question: "Are we going to launch biased investigations each time a difference appears in the literature?"

Shameless pandering to old fossil fuel interests is one thing; using the oversight power of Congress to harass scientists because you disagree with their conclusions is another.

House speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., should step in and call off Barton's witch hunt of climate scientists. Barton is way out of line.

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