

America's Scientists To House Science Committee: Go Away

by [Samantha Page](#)  Nov 25, 2015



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Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) is on a "witch hunt," one of his colleagues says.

Seven major American scientific societies sent a letter to Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) on Tuesday, rebuking the congressman and defending a paper published in *Science* last year that Smith has been investigating in his role as chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

“Scientists should not be subjected to fraud investigations or harassment simply for providing scientific results that some may see as politically controversial,” wrote the scientists.

The paper in question — “Possible artifacts of data biases in the recent global surface warming hiatus” — disputes the existence of a slowdown in global warming, a theory which has served as a popular talking point for people who do not accept the scientific consensus around climate change.

Smith has subpoenaed scientists who worked on the paper at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for internal documents relating to the research and has accused the federally-funded research center of altering data.

NOAA has resisted turning over the documents, arguing that Smith’s inquiry — what another committee member called a “witch hunt” — is both politically driven and likely to chill future scientific inquiry.

The letter, sent Tuesday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Chemical Society, the American Geophysical Union, the American

Meteorological Society, the American Statistical Association, the Ecological Society of America, and the Geological Society of America, echoed NOAA's concerns.

“The integrity of federal scientists’ research published in the journal *Science* is being questioned despite a lack of public evidence of scientific misconduct. The progress and integrity of science depend on transparency about the details of scientific methodology and the ability to follow the pursuit of scientific knowledge,” the scientists wrote.

Smith has threatened to also subpoena Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker over the documents.

It’s a telling aspect of the state of America’s scientific literacy that the head of the House committee that covers science doesn’t believe — or trust — scientists.

When the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its most recent assessment, saying that scientists have “high confidence” that “severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems” are in our fossil-fuel driven future, Smith dismissed the findings. “Similar to previous reports, the latest findings appear more political than scientific,” Lamar said at the time.

Congress — particularly Republicans — have been criticized for being “out of step” with the American public on the issue of climate change. Recent poll results have shown that some 70 percent of Americans accept the scientific consensus that the world is getting warmer.

Less than half of Congress — including only 30 percent of the Senate — are willing to say the same.

A recent study suggested that climate denial messages stemming from fossil fuel industries has played a key role in the continued polarization of the climate change issue.