



Defend Science

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Dear Friend,

In the course of building a movement to defend science, including working to raise funds to get the Defend Science Statement published in major news media, many important questions have been raised. This letter addresses many of these questions.

The Defend Science Statement concisely and powerfully summarizes the current very dangerous attack on science and scientific thinking. The statement brings out that the attacks on evolution, muzzling of global warming scientists, "scientific McCarthyism" in relation to appointments to government advisory boards, and many other particular features, all add up to a larger picture of an underlying attack on scientific thinking and method. It has been signed by over 1,400 scientists and members of the scientific community, including 12 Nobel prize winners, and many, many other prominent scientists.

At a time when we have a U.S. President who can state that evolution is not a fact, and who continues to launch many other attacks on science, the Statement is a call from scientists for a nation-wide outpouring of support for science. There have been many important efforts in this direction by scientists - but more is needed.

Though the Statement was drafted over a year ago, every part of it is still, unfortunately, true. The attacks on science continue. A whole series of actions by the Bush administration since the last election underscores the importance of getting the Statement out into society now. To cite just a few:

- The U. S. government vetoed all attempts to set restrictions greenhouse gases or take any kind of significant action, at the November global-warming conference in Africa. With the recent release of the IPCC report on global warming, Bush's Energy Secretary, Samuel Bodman, responded by saying that "the Bush administration would continue to oppose mandatory reduction" in greenhouse gases - because "mandatory caps on CO₂ emissions could financially ruin some of the energy companies responsible for air pollution."

- After the November elections, Bush appointed Eric Keroack, an anti-birth control, anti-abortion, and anti-science doctor as head of a key government body responsible for family planning.

- Bush continues to state that he will again veto any attempt to legislate governmental support for

stem-cell research.

The Statement points to the unprecedented alliance and intertwining of two key developments: the Bush administration's distortion of the integrity of the scientific process to serve political ends; the ideological agenda put forward by powerful Christian fundamentalist forces. This is unprecedented. While making explicitly clear that this is not about science trying to destroy religion, the Statement says that it is about opposing both a political agenda and a particular biblical literalist ideology that seeks to undermine and destroy the scientific method and process.

There is an unrelenting assault on people's access to scientific knowledge, to the scientific method and approach to knowing about the world, to the scientific spirit. The "Defend Science" statement aims to give voice and expression to the desire many people have to understand how and why things in nature are the way they are, and to people's hunger to learn what science continues to uncover.

To get this timely and urgent message to millions of people we are currently raising funds to place ads in major news media. There is an urgent need to reach very broadly, far beyond the "usual suspects". One member of Defend Science wrote: "last spring I traveled to Anaheim, CA for the National Science Teachers' Association convention. This was occurring right on the heels of the Dover, PA decision against ID. We and Defend Science got a very warm welcome from hundreds of the high school teachers there and many have signed the statement - but along with that we often got an earful along the lines of: "...it's about time you academics came down out of your ivory tower and helped us! We're out here in the localities catching hell from ID and other more crude forms of creationists. Many of us are being intimidated into not teaching evolution. For every victory like Dover there are scores of school boards, state boards, etc., getting bombarded by these forces".

Running the Statement in major news media will enable scientists to speak broadly to the population - including in particular those who are especially the targets of these attempts to deny science education, and access to scientific knowledge and scientific thinking. Running the ad in major news media will greatly help people like the teachers we talked to in Anaheim - it will show them that the scientific community "has their backs", and will encourage and strengthen their own efforts, and, we hope, it will encourage many to become part of a kind of movement to Defend Science.

And there are other readers of these media sources who are perhaps less clear or knowledgeable about the importance of science, or are influenced by Christian fundamentalism, but who do recognize science as a crucial part of modern life. We think that these people are going to be jolted by the Statement, in a good way. It will sound an alarm and raise some big questions about what is going on, and why, and what this means. It will spark thinking about all kinds of questions - and without this kind of broad outreach and ferment, we cannot win the battle to defend science.

We fully recognize that publishing the Statement once in a major news media outlet will not defeat the attacks on science by itself. We more see it as a beginning of a larger fight, but a beginning is urgently needed. For this reason we have launched an all-out fund-raising campaign to get the needed funds by April, 2007. So please give this letter and its appeal serious consideration.

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