

Trump Administration Has Begun a War on Science, Researchers Say

Nearly 2,000 scientists urged that Congress restore funding to federal agencies decimated by recent cuts.



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By Benjamin Mueller

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Some 1,900 leading researchers accused the Trump administration in an open letter on Monday of conducting a “wholesale assault on U.S. science” that could set back research by decades and that threatens the health and safety of Americans.

The letter’s signatories, all of them elected members of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, warned of the damage being done by layoffs at health and science agencies and cuts and delays to funding that has historically supported research inside the government and across American universities.

“For over 80 years, wise investments by the U.S. government have built up the nation’s research enterprise, making it the envy of the world,” the letter said. “Astoundingly, the Trump administration is destabilizing this enterprise by gutting funding for research, firing thousands of scientists, removing public access to scientific data and pressuring researchers to alter or abandon their work on ideological grounds.”

The letter said that many universities and research institutions had so far “kept silent to avoid antagonizing the administration and jeopardizing their funding.” But, it said, “the nation’s scientific enterprise is being decimated.”

The signatories called on Americans to appeal to Congress to protect scientific funding.

With Elon Musk's efforts to cut spending and President Trump's crackdown on institutions he sees as ideological enemies, the administration has sought to dismantle parts of the federal government's scientific funding apparatus.

Funding from the National Institutes of Health, which supports work by more than 300,000 scientists across the country, has fallen billions of dollars short of typical levels during the early months of the Trump administration.

The White House has also moved to cancel research in specific areas, like transgender health and climate science.

The Trump administration announced last week that it was laying off 10,000 employees at the Health and Human Services Department as part of a broad reorganization that reflected the priorities of the health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The department has hired a discredited vaccine skeptic to research a link, long debunked by scientists, between vaccines and autism. On Friday, the nation's top vaccine regulator resigned, citing Mr. Kennedy's "misinformation and lies."

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In recent weeks, members of the National Academy of Medicine, a nonprofit organization that provides independent health policy advice, began discussing their concerns with members of the national academies of sciences and engineering.

Those conversations gave rise to the open letter, said Dr. Steven Woolf, an organizer of the letter who studies health policy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The letter was drafted by a group of 13 scientists representing fields like medicine, climate science, sociology and economics.

“I know what this is going to do to life expectancy in the United States, to mortality rates, to the mental health crisis we’re having,” Dr. Woolf said. “These changes in the research enterprise are going to translate into harms to everyday Americans.”

Dr. Woolf cited, for example, the planned restructuring of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a small agency charged with protecting patient safety and guaranteeing Americans access to free preventive services like mammograms.

“The agency responsible for protecting the quality of health care in the United States just got demolished,” Dr. Woolf said.

The letter outlines the consequences of funding cuts, including pauses on research studies, faculty layoffs and reduced graduate student enrollments.

It also accuses the administration of “engaging in censorship” by, among other things, “blocking research on topics it finds objectionable, such as climate change, or that yields results it does not like, on topics ranging from vaccine safety to economic trends.”

Benjamin Mueller reports on health and medicine. He was previously a U.K. correspondent in London and a police reporter in New York. More about Benjamin Mueller