Protecting Federal Sector Scientists

Presented at the Center for Science in the Public Interest Conference
Rejuvenating Federal Sector Science
July 11, 2008
J. William Hirzy
WHY BOTHER?

• “Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government.

• “To penetrate and dissipate these clouds of darkness, the general mind must be strengthened by education.” .....Thomas Jefferson
Why Bother (con’t)

• “Pray for a good harvest……but keep on hoeing.”..Anonymous
Environmental Challenges to Civilization

- Climate Change
- Population Growth
- Habitat Destruction
- Resource Depletion
- Environmental Pollution
Characteristics of Federal Science

• Policy Leverage
• Altruism
• Openness
Climate Change

• Q. “What would it take to create a Manhattan Project effort to develop solar and wind power to supply all our electricity needs?”

• A. “We only lack the political will to do it.”
  …A DOE Presidential appointee
Federal Scientists and Building Political Will

• Research and analyses by Federal scientists must be freely available

• to help ..”dissipate these clouds of darkness”..and aid in..“strengthening the general mind”..so that..“the people are well informed…”
Steps to That End

• **No. 1** Reduce the impact of the “ethos of commerce” on federal sector science by getting the Office of Management and Budget out of the science policy business.
Steps (con’t)

• **No. 2** Protect scientists who blow the whistle by enacting into law what now is known as HR 985 which provides for…

• specific protection for scientific whistleblowing

• jury trials in whistleblower cases

• a *requirement* for substantial penalties for managers who violate employee rights
Steps (con’t)

• **No. 3** Enact Partnership legislation that, among other provisions, requires management to bargain over “methods, means and technology of doing work,” which will allow unions to negotiate conditions under which scientists can make their work most easily and appropriately available to the public.
Steps (con’t)

• Under Partnership, consult with unions on

• A. Language for a managers’ Critical Job Element on encouraging staff communication with the public

• B. Identifying managers responsible for suppressing scientific communications
Steps (con’t)

• **No. 4** Minimize Manager-Scientist Conflict: Options-

  • A. Scientists’ supervisors must be scientists conversant with or expert in the science behind staff’s work.

  • B. Give Senior Scientists decision making authority and relegate supervisors to administrative duties.
Steps (con’t)

• No. 5 Enact legislation requiring all Inspector general inquiries to be conducted with all witnesses under oath

• Management pressure has caused witnesses in “informal” I.G. inquiries to be less than truthful
Steps (con’t)

• **No. 6** Scientists must recognize their responsibility in building political will to progress and…

Shed their inhibitions about collective action on matters of scientific integrity, recognizing that…

Unions can and do act exclusively in the public interest and outside the “ethos of commerce”
Parting Thought

• To meet our environmental challenges the body politic must understand the consequences of failure and express the political will to get the job done. The knowledge, skills and abilities of federal sector scientists are a resource that must be used to the maximum in this effort and not wasted in dark and dusty corners of a repressive bureaucracy.