Dear Supporter,

The White House is looking for a few good toxicologists.

Its Office of Management & Budget wants to beef up its ranks of toxicologists as risk assessments play a bigger role in agency public health and environmental science and regulations. Identical toxicologist openings posted on the USA/Jobs website say these specialists will –

- Evaluate “the scientific analyses underlying environmental health and safety analyses submitted to OIRA [OMB’s Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs] by Federal agencies for review”;

- “Coordinate interagency review of health and environmental risk assessments…Implement existing guidance and contribute to new guidance designed to strengthen the objectivity, accuracy, integrity, and transparency of scientific analyses underlying Federal policies”; and

- “Develop and give briefings for OMB management and policy officials and Executive Office of the President officials regarding the scientific merits of agency analyses, and the implications of agency science policy on the public policy decisions they must make.”

Historically, OMB predominantly employs attorneys, analysts, and sometimes statisticians while deferring to scientists and other subject-matter experts inside agencies in reviewing regulatory proposals. Creating a team of in-house toxicologists would better enable OMB to overrule agency-produced science, as well as rewrite any proposed rule-making.

Toxicology is a discipline with a growing application to federal regulation. Currently, for example, EPA is undertaking a massive evaluation of the safety of existing chemicals under landmark amendments adopted to The Toxic Substance Control Act in 2016.

This move enables the White House to bring industry scientists onboard to ride herd on regulations affecting their own industries. The fear is that the OMB is creating a new specialty – political toxicology.

With no consensus in Congress to change laws, how the current laws are interpreted is the venue for change. That is why PEER is increasingly caught up in complex cost-benefit reviews, science policies, and other internal gyrations, as Trump appointees seek to put their thumb on the scientific scales weighing public health protections.

The integrity of federal risk assessments is increasingly at risk. You and your family have a direct stake
in these outcomes. Please pitch in.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director

P.S. Is OSTP More Than an Anagram for STOP? A year-and-a-half into his presidency, Donald Trump has finally named someone to head his White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), doubling the modern record for leaving this post vacant. Kelvin Droegemeier is a University of Oklahoma meteorologist and expert on extreme weather – a growth field if ever there was one. It is not clear if Trump will also make the OSTP director his White House science adviser, as has been done by the past three presidents. OSTP has shrunk in total staff by more than half and now plays little role in administration policy-making. Failure to give Dr. Droegemeier this dual role will leave him isolated in a position of limited influence. On the other hand, given the ultra-high turnover of White House staff, perhaps isolation is the only recipe for survival in Trump-land.

P.P.S. Pruitt Climate Goose Chase. Our ongoing FOIA lawsuit to force EPA to disclose the alternative climate science that Scott Pruitt kept referencing is drawing to a close. The agency now admits that Pruitt had no data to support his climate claims. It is now searching to see if EPA ever produced any research indicating that human activity is not the main factor driving climate change. The agency unsuccessfully complained that this is too heavy a task. We convinced EPA that it could save a lot of time by simply asking the agency’s own climate scientists. So, it looks like our suit will have the beneficial side-effect of inducing EPA to finally talk with its climate experts. We sincerely hope that a dialogue blossoms.

P.P.P.S. Poisoning Our Wildlife Refuges. Culminating a five-year PEER litigation and advocacy campaign in 2014, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service banned any genetically modified crops and the associated powerful insecticides from all National Wildlife Refuges. Last week, without any public announcement, the Service rescinded the ban. These GM crops and their neonic pesticides have served no legitimate refuge purpose but the harms they wreak on refuge wildlife, soil, and waters are clear. It looks like the battle to protect the biological integrity of refuges has opened yet another chapter.

P.P.P.S. Florida’s Waters Awash in Cow Manure. Florida’s waters are today suffering a toxic collision of red tide and blue-green algal blooms. These natural phenomena are greatly exacerbated by excess nutrient and phosphorous pollution. A major contributor PEER has uncovered is the lack of meaningful limits or standards governing billions of pounds of cow manure each year. Heavy rain storms scour out huge unlined holding lagoons into surrounding waters that are already impaired.

Of course, Florida’s worsening water quality is further aggravated by the utter collapse of pollution enforcement under Gov. Rick Scott. Our Florida PEER annual enforcement scorecards have garnered wide attention for enabling folks to see an apples-to-apples comparison over time. The numbers don’t lie.