



PEER

PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY • ROCKY MOUNTAIN

Jennifer Mercer; jmercer@nsf.gov

Frank Rack; frack@nsf.gov

Greg Anderson; greander@nsf.gov

Mark Stielglitz; MSTEIGLI@nsf.gov

Anne Johansen; Anne Johansen@nsf.gov

Sylvia Edgerton; sedgerto@nsf.gov

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Dear Drs. Mercer, Armstrong, Rack, Stieglitz, Johansen, and Edgerton,

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) is a non-profit, government watchdog organization. PEER supports current and former public employees who seek a higher standard of environmental ethics and scientific integrity within their agencies. PEER defends whistleblowers, shines the light on improper or illegal government actions, works to improve laws and regulations, and supports the work of other organizations.

I am writing to you as the Director the Rocky Mountain office to respectfully request that the National Science Foundation (NSF) call for the University of Colorado-Boulder (CU), to stop spending funds from the NSF grants awarded to Dr. Detlev Helmig at CU, Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR). We request that until the status of Dr. Helmig's dismissal has been investigated by an independent authority, that the grants are not transferred to another Principal Investigator. And, we respectfully request that the NSF remain open to the possibility of the grants being transferred to another academic institution with Dr. Helmig.

Dr. Helmig is a world-renowned expert in atmospheric research and climate science and has been working at CU Boulder for the last 25 years. As an Associate Research Professor at INSTAAR, he has been researching, teaching and published more than 200 scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals.

The career of Dr. Helmig has been exclusively been supported by outside contracts, overwhelmingly by National Science Foundation research projects and

funding. Dr. Helmig's impressive CV resulted from NSF-funded research. He has produced scientific work that has become highly valuable to the community and served relentlessly disseminating research to students and to the public. He has been an ambassador of atmospheric and polar science as a mentor to students and scientists from developing countries. At the time of his termination, Dr. Helmig was working on four active NSF awards. As the NSF has been a steward in directing the career and the work of Dr. Helmig, his career should be of concern to NSF.

During the first week of April, the University of Colorado- Boulder, abruptly and unannounced, terminated the appointments of Dr. Detlev Helmig. As of yet, he has not had an opportunity to explain or defend the allegations. After his dismissal, the University took ten weeks to produce a report, with highly questionable justifications.

Effective with the termination, CU removed Dr. Helmig from his NSF awards and assigned other scientists to lead these projects. Fellow scientists particularly question the legitimacy of CU's removal of Dr. Helmig as the lead investigator on the NSF research grants that were awarded to Dr. Helmig. His expertise and understanding of the work cannot be replaced. The re-assignment of NSF funds is undermining the NSF peer review process for awarding federal funding to the most deserving applicants.

There is also grave concern about the sudden disruption of the collection of continuous climate records that these scientists have initiated and overseen to the day of their termination. Can you please provide us with an update on how this work is expected to continue if the University does not have anyone that has the experience to carry on this work?

Climate science is under attack.¹ In a politically divided country, public institutions, like CU, may find it is easier to dismiss the messenger rather than manage the pressure from those that do not agree with the message. The community response to Dr. Helmig's dismissal has been overwhelming.

In the linked June 17, 2020 "Open Letter to the University of Colorado Board of Regents", 14 prominent climate researchers decry the treatment of Dr. Helmig and declare:

"As a result, important scientific records regarding the rapidly changing

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/climate/climate-science-trump.html>

Arctic environments, which Dr. Helmig has maintained for over a decade, as well as current activities are in jeopardy.”

Please see also the linked community letter in support of Dr. Helmig. This letter was signed by a broad range of people that care about scientific integrity.

Governor Richard Lamm, an ex-Boulder Mayor, CU alumni, current faculty and academics, as well as national groups like the Environmental Integrity Project and the Union of Concerned Scientists do not want science politicized by special interest groups.

Despite the urging of PEER, environmental groups, scientific integrity groups, and numerous individuals, CU has not responded to the call for an independent investigation. PEER urges that NSF addresses the questionable termination by joining the request for an independent, unbiased third-party investigation.

Sincerely,

Chandra Rosenthal
Rocky Mountain Director

Please see:

[Community letter](#) from 39 organizations and 162 individuals to University of Colorado president Mark Kennedy.

[Letter by climate scientists](#) to the University of Colorado Board of Regents

[Article in Inside Climate News](#) by National Press award-winning reporter Daniel Glick

[Opinion Editorial in Daily Camera by Senator Steve Fenberg, Colorado Senate Majority Leader and Elise Jones, Boulder County Commissioner](#)

And most recently: <https://www.dailycamera.com/2020/07/04/guest-opinion-cory-carroll-helmigs-work-has-saved-lives>