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**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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August 29, 2016

The Honorable Suzette Kimball  
Director  
U.S. Geological Survey  
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive  
Reston, VA 20192

Dear Director Kimball:

In June 2016, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department of the Interior (DOI) released a report entitled "Scientific Integrity Incident at USGS Energy Geochemistry Laboratory." This report summarized OIG's inspection of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Energy Resources Program (ERP) Geochemistry Laboratory in Lakewood, Colorado for fiscal years (FYs) 2008 through 2014.<sup>1</sup> OIG initiated its review after it was made aware of a DOI Scientific Integrity Review Panel report which concluded a "chronic pattern of scientific misconduct" existed at the laboratory, and that its line-chemist had "intentionally manipulated" data derived from the laboratory's mass spectrometer during the years in question.<sup>2</sup>

The findings of the Scientific Integrity Review Panel are extremely troubling and threaten to impugn the credibility of USGS as well as any actions that were taken or works that were produced based upon or incorporating data derived from the laboratory. The Committee on Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations takes matters related to scientific integrity very seriously as science, developed and made available in a transparent manner, is an essential tool for guiding the formation of policy decisions as well as for scholarly or private sector pursuits. This concern was conveyed to DOI's Deputy Inspector General Mary Kendall during a Subcommittee hearing on June 23,

<sup>1</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY AT USGS ENERGY GEOCHEMISTRY LABORATORY (2016). <https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/2016EAU010Public.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Scientific Integrity Review Panel Report, *cited in* OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, *supra* note 1, at 4.

2016. Following a series of questions related to scientific integrity incidents at the Lakewood ERP Laboratory, one of my Subcommittee colleagues, Rep. Bruce Westerman stated, “if the base research is flawed, then that affects work that goes out from there, and we spent \$108 million for this research . . . .”<sup>3</sup>

In addition, Rep. Westerman noted the Subcommittee’s concern that the full extent of the damage attributable to the scientific misconduct and data manipulation remains undetermined.<sup>4</sup> The OIG also noted in its report that the full extent of the impacts are “still unfolding and challenging to quantify.”<sup>5</sup> However, OIG’s ability to assess the scope of the damage is complicated by the fact that the laboratory’s line-chemist “failed to preserve the [manipulated] data”.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in order for the Subcommittee to better understand the potential impacts of the scientific misconduct and so that a full and complete record of relevant documents and communications can be produced to the Subcommittee, I would request that all records related to the scientific integrity incident at the USGS ERP Geochemistry Laboratory in Lakewood, Colorado be preserved, including, but not limited to, records related to:

1. Any and all records of projects undertaken by the Lakewood, Colorado USGS ERP Laboratory for FYs 2008 through 2014, whether completed or uncompleted, and accompanying post-project completion records;
2. Data produced by the Inorganic Section’s line-chemist for FYs 2008 through 2014;
3. Any and all personnel records for the line-chemist referenced in the June 2016 OIG report;
4. Any and all correspondences of USGS personnel, including internal memoranda, regarding or related to the scientific integrity incident;
5. Any and all correspondences to USGS or USGS personnel regarding or relating to the scientific integrity incident; and
6. Any and all communication between USGS or USGS personnel and third parties, including Congress and government agencies, referring or relating to the scientific integrity incident.

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<sup>3</sup> *Oversight Hearing on the Administration’s Response to Findings of Unethical and Criminal Conduct at the Department of the Interior Before the Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations of the H. Comm on Natural Resources, 114th Cong. (2016) (statement of Rep. Bruce Westerman, Member, H. Comm. on Natural Resources).*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, *supra* note 1, at 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 4.

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In addition, no later than September 6, 2016, please provide to the Subcommittee a detailed explanation of the actions USGS has taken and is planning to take to ensure all records related to this incident are preserved.

Please have your staff contact Christopher Santini or Sang Yi of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations at (202) 225-7107 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Louie Gohmert  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations

cc: The Honorable Debbie Dingell, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations