

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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June 7, 2018

Dr. Elisabete Weiderpass  
Cancer Registry of Norway  
Institute of Population Based Cancer Research  
Postbox 5313  
Majorstuen, 0304 Oslo, Norway

Dear Dr. Weiderpass:

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is aware of your recent election as the new Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Since 2016, the Committee has been conducting oversight of IARC's Monograph Programme. In the course of this process, we have written several letters to IARC outlining concerns with the agency and have held a hearing to examine the flaws in the science and procedures of the Monograph Programme. In order to better understand how you will manage the IARC Monograph Programme, the Committee requests your testimony at a hearing in July 2018.

The Monograph Programme has been a recipient of significant criticism from a wide range of individuals and establishments, including scientists, judges, and Members of the U.S. Congress. Unfortunately, given the information collected and evaluated by the Committee, the way the Monograph Programme operated under Director Christopher Wild was an affront to scientific integrity and bred distrust and confusion in the marketplace and amongst government regulators. In its most recent oversight, the Committee has discovered that serious flaws existed in the glyphosate Monograph study and that despite these issues, Monograph participants used the study to influence policymakers in both Europe and the United States. The following presents a summary of the concerns that the Committee has uncovered regarding Monograph 112 and IARC Monograph Programme.

According to reports by Reuters, the IARC Working Group for the glyphosate Monograph ignored studies and data that contradicted its seemingly pre-determined conclusion

that glyphosate was carcinogenic.<sup>1</sup> The animal studies section of the Monograph that pointed to a lack of connection between glyphosate and cancer were omitted or altered.<sup>2</sup> Ten significant changes were found when comparing the draft chapter on the animal studies to the final Monograph.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the most recent data from the Agricultural Health Study (AHS), led by the U.S. National Cancer Institute, was completely disregarded by the Working Group. The AHS has the largest collection of data on human exposure to glyphosate, and the Study found no link between the use of glyphosate by agricultural workers and cancer.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Aaron Blair, the epidemiologist who chaired a 2015 meeting on glyphosate and who was a senior researcher on the AHS study, knew of the data and admitted the study would have “altered IARC’s analysis.”<sup>5</sup> Despite his familiarity with the study, he did not present its findings to the Working Group.

The Committee expressed these concerns in its November 20, 2017, letter to Director Wild.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Wild responded that the monograph does not use any unpublished information.<sup>7</sup> While the Committee understands that the study was not published at the time of the Monograph deliberations, the significance of the findings, which were known to some participants at the time, warranted at least some consideration by IARC. Even if the Working Group was prevented from officially considering the data, there were other options available, such as waiting to publish the Monograph until after the data was published. The unpublished data was simply too significant to disregard.

Moreover, the Monograph Programme also suffers from a lack of transparency. IARC does not release drafts or deliberative materials and discourages scientists from speaking about the science behind the Monographs, even after publication.<sup>8</sup> After the glyphosate Monograph drafts were made public by Reuters, IARC posted a statement on its website urging that participants “not feel pressured to discuss their deliberations.”<sup>9</sup> There is also no public comment period nor any way for the public to know what happens behind closed doors.

Access to data and methods should not be a privilege reserved for the few that find themselves in IARC’s inner circle. Transparency ensures that everyone can examine the process

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Kelland, *In glyphosate review, WHO cancer agency edited out "non-carcinogenic" findings*, REUTERS, Oct. 19, 2017, available at <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/glyphosate-cancer-data/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Reuters Staff, *Large U.S. farm study finds no cancer link to Monsanto weedkiller*, REUTERS, Nov. 9, 2017, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-cancer-glyphosate/large-u-s-farm-study-finds-no-cancer-link-to-monsanto-weedkiller-idUSKBN1D916C>.

<sup>5</sup> *In glyphosate review, supra* note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Dr. Christopher Wild to Hon. Lamar Smith and Hon. Andy Biggs (Nov. 20, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *In glyphosate review, supra* note 1.

<sup>9</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer, *IARC Monograph on Glyphosate*, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, [https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/2016/glyphosate\\_IARC2016.php](https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/2016/glyphosate_IARC2016.php) (last visited May 29, 2018).

that is the foundation of the Monograph's designations and assess the quality and robustness of the Monograph Programme's science. The Committee raised these issue with Dr. Wild, who replied that these policies protect the Working Group scientists from individuals with vested interests.<sup>10</sup> He further argued that this type of non-transparency was "standard practice in scientific committees."<sup>11</sup> This is a nonsensical position since agencies that perform similar work like European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the Environmental Protection Agency frequently publish draft reviews and have public comment periods.<sup>12</sup>

Besides issues concerning the lack scientific integrity and transparency, the Committee has found alarming instances of conflicts of interests, particularly with Christopher Portier. In 2014, Portier chaired the IARC Working Group that proposed an assessment on glyphosate. During this time, Portier was also a private litigation consultant on a separate matter for the same law firm that went on to sue on the glyphosate issue.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, Portier was working as a senior scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).<sup>14</sup> In fact, Portier's work for EDF included promoting a wristband that exposes the hazards of chemicals and pesticides.<sup>15</sup>

In 2015, Portier assumed a role as an Invited Specialist on the glyphosate assessment, while still maintaining his ties with EDF. Despite these conflicts of interest, he still influenced the interpretation of the glyphosate assessment, in direct violation of Monograph's stated rules.<sup>16</sup> Finally, less than two weeks after the glyphosate assessment went public, Portier joined the same law firm mentioned above, but this time as a litigation consultant against glyphosate.<sup>17</sup>

After the Committee wrote Dr. Wild on these issues, he responded that in Portier's position as an Invited Specialist, he did not "draft text that pertains to the description or interpretation of cancer data, or participate in the evaluation."<sup>18</sup> However, documents obtained by the Committee revealed that Portier did in fact influence the interpretation of the glyphosate Monograph. Portier discussed the Monograph with the Working Group authors,<sup>19</sup> he

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Dr. Christopher Wild to Hon. Lamar Smith and Hon. Andy Biggs (Nov. 20, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *In glyphosate review, supra* note 1.

<sup>13</sup> Portier Dep. 75:14- 75:22, Oct. 6, 2017 (*see also* Ben Webster, *Weedkiller scientist was paid £120,000 by cancer lawyers*, THE TIMES U.K., (Oct. 18, 2017) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/weedkiller-scientist-was-paid-120-000-by-cancer-lawyers-v0qggbrk6>).

<sup>14</sup> Portier Dep. 25:17- 25:24, Oct. 6, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> E-mail from Chris Portier to Linda Birnbaum (Oct. 21, 2015, 12:06 AM EDT) (*see also* Advocacy Partner of Environmental Defense Fund, Report: EDF Deploys New Technology, Shows Americans Can't Avoid Hazardous Chemicals (Oct. 16, 2015)).

<sup>16</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer, *preamble*, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Preamble/CurrentPreamble.pdf> (last visited Jan. 30, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Portier Dep. 75:5- 75:13, Oct. 6, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Dr. Christopher Wild to Hon. Lamar Smith and Hon. Andy Biggs (Nov. 20, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> E-mail from Kathryn Guyton to Chris Portier, Matthew Ross, Lauren Zeise, et al. (March 6, 2015, 4:40 PM).



developed responses to EFSA's glyphosate assessment,<sup>20</sup> and he spearheaded a letter sent to the European Commission on Health and Food Safety on the glyphosate Monograph.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Wild refused to acknowledge any issues with the Monograph Programme despite the evidence presented by the Committee that called into question the science and integrity of the agency.

This letter spelled out just some examples of the recent criticism the IARC Monograph Programme has received. While the Committee is hopeful that your directorship will have a positive influence on the integrity of the Monograph Programme, some of your previous statements were in support of the status quo. In 2015, you signed a letter led by Portier to EFSA citing the findings of the glyphosate Monograph, aligning yourself with shoddy and politics-driven science. Ironically, the letter discussed the need for scientific transparency and the ability to "objectively evaluate the findings."<sup>22</sup> The evidence outlined in this letter suggests that these principles only apply when beneficial to IARC insiders.

It is the hope of the Committee that you will use your directorship to correct the flaws in IARC, both with the quality of assessments and with the evaluation process itself. Given these concerns, we request that you make yourself available for testimony so that the Committee can better understand how you intend to address the many issues confronting the Programme. Please provide a response to the Committee with available dates no later than June 14, 2018.

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has jurisdiction over environmental and scientific research and developmental programs and "shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Governmental activities" as set forth in House Rule X. This request and any documents created as a result of this request will be deemed congressional documents and property of the House Science Committee.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact the Committee staff at 202-225-6371. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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<sup>20</sup> E-mail from Chris Portier to Isabelle Baldi, Aaron Blair, Peter Egeghy, et al. (Nov. 10, 2015, 10:53 AM).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Chris Portier, Elisabete Weiderpass, et.al. to Vytenis Andriukaitis (Nov. 27, 2015).

Dr. Elisabete Weiderpass

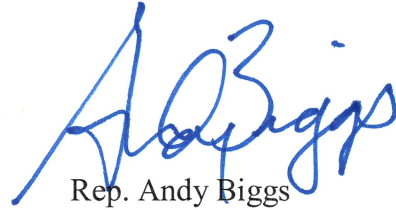
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Sincerely,



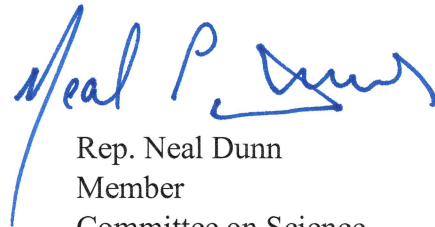
Rep. Lamar Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Science,  
Space, and Technology



Rep. Andy Biggs  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on  
Environment



Rep. Frank Lucas  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Science  
Space, and Technology



Rep. Neal Dunn  
Member  
Committee on Science  
Space, and Technology

cc: The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Environment, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology