

Taylor and Gibbs: A big step forward for Canada's federal scientists



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Things sure have improved since this day in 2013, when scientists held countrywide protests about federal public service scientists being muzzled. A new collective agreement enshrines protections, say Katie Gibbs and Stephanie Taylor. *SEAN KILPATRICK / THE CANADIAN PRESS*

Since the election of Donald Trump, Canada has been distancing itself from U.S. policies on everything from immigration to human rights to science.

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland gave a hard-hitting speech last Tuesday asserting that Canada will step up to lead on the world's stage, and a part of that leadership needs to be progress on science.

Under the Trump administration, U.S. federal scientists have been

silenced, restricted from speaking publicly and face a dizzying array of funding cuts and closures. The breathtakingly senseless cuts proposed in the recent U.S. budget will, if even partially enacted, decimate the scientific capacity of the United States for years to come, putting the health and prosperity of Americans at serious risk.

Canada continued to distinguish itself from the U.S. in its support for science last week with a huge stride forward in protecting public science. The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (the union representing the majority of federal scientists) and the Liberal government signed a new collective agreement, with an explicit commitment to create science integrity policies for all federal departments (with 10 or more scientific staff) by 2018.

These science integrity policies aim to ensure that federal scientists are free to speak publicly about their work (including to media), that research generated by federal scientists is publicly released in a timely manner and that federal science is protected from industrial, commercial or political interests.

If any of these measures are ignored or violated, the affected federal scientist(s) could file an official grievance with their union.

This is a huge win both for federal scientists and for all Canadians. Science integrity policies help ensure that essential information on everything from climate change to emerging public health issues and drug safety information is released by the government in a timely manner and that this information is accurate and independent. This is information that Canadians need to make informed decisions and hold their governments accountable. This collective agreement works to protect public science that serves Canadians.

Having these science integrity policies in place is a huge step, but it is not a final step. The Obama administration implemented science integrity policies in some federal science-oriented departments, but these policies were not strong or comprehensive enough to stop the Trump

administration from bringing in sweeping communication restrictions within days of Trump's inauguration.

If Canada wants to continue to step away from the U.S. and take a bolder, more progressive leadership role on the international stage, the Liberal government will need to take make our science integrity policies strong and more robust than the Obama administration did.

Science integrity policies are not the only recent science policy development. The report from the Fundamental Science Review Panel provides a comprehensive road map for reinstating Canada as a global leader in academic research, and an announcement of a new Chief Science Advisor is imminent.

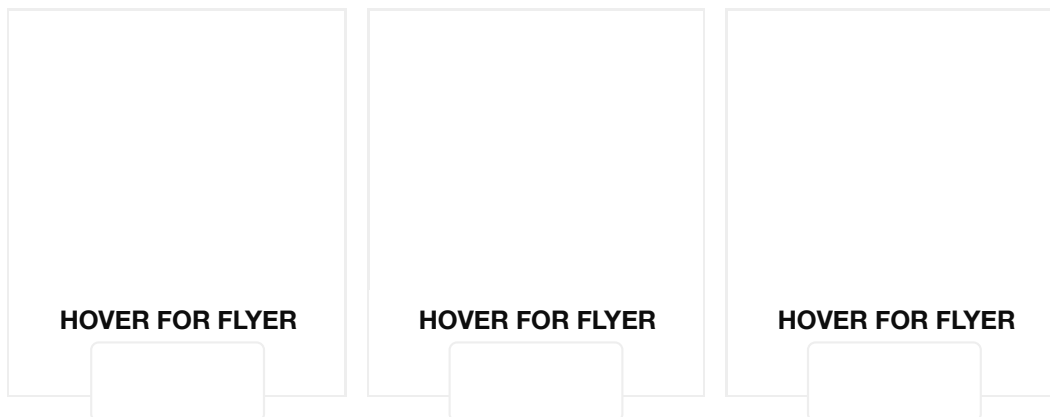
These initiatives put Canada on the cusp of being a global leader for science integrity and science-based policy. But we want to lead, and we can't take our current progress for granted. The government must work to create strong and enforceable science integrity policies in all relevant departments and continue to support science through fully implementing the Fundamental Science Review recommendations and ensuring the new Chief Science Advisor leads by example internationally.

With half of their mandate to go, this government has a chance to make a lasting impact on science Canada and to further differentiate itself on the world's stage.

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