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SCIENCE: 10,600 scientists sign letter protesting political interference

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More than 10,000 scientists now have signed onto a letter protesting alleged instances of political interference in government science, an advocacy group said today.

The Union of Concerned Scientists began circulating the letter in February 2004. Fifty-two Nobel Prize winners are among the 10,600 who have signed the statement, said the group, which also released a report today outlining many of the censorship claims (*Greenwire*, Feb. 19, 2004).

"In recent years, however, scientists who work for and advise the federal government have seen their work manipulated, suppressed [and] distorted," reads the introduction to the document, which UCS released today in San Francisco, at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

Bush administration officials have denied the claims. Speaking last spring at a House Science Committee hearing, John Marburger, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, told lawmakers he "couldn't agree more with the undesirability of politicizing science" -- echoing similar remarks against censorship by the heads of NOAA and NASA.

The UCS report comes at a time when scientific freedom is emerging as a key issue for the next Congress, with incoming Democratic committee chairs in both chambers pledging greater oversight of censorship allegations.

The issue gained prominence last year, when NASA climatologist James Hansen accused political appointees in his agency of censoring his views on global warming, with reports of censorship later surfacing at U.S. EPA, NOAA, the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies (*Greenwire*, Nov. 17).