



Remarks by Mark S. Frankel, Ph.D., Director, Program on Scientific Freedom,
Responsibility and Law of the American Association for the Advancement of Science

At the Launch of Professionals for the Public Interest Coalition
May 20, 2009
National Press Club, Washington, DC

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the largest multi-disciplinary scientific society in the world. Our mission is to “advance science and serve society” through initiatives in science education, science policy, international programs, and an array of activities designed to engage the public on matters of science.

We are committed to protecting the integrity of science through our programs and activities that address scientific freedom and responsibility, professional ethics, and the use of science in policymaking. It is this commitment that aligns us with the new Professionals for the Public Interest Coalition.

Modern societies tend to attribute considerable value to scientific inquiry. People recognize the enormous power of expert knowledge and the influence it can have on their lives. All of us look to scientists for authoritative answers to the complex and serious problems of the day.

It is understood, then, by both scientists and the larger society, that there is a critical need for an independent and reliable scientific voice when making policy decisions with a strong technical component. By virtue of their special knowledge and skills, scientists are particularly qualified to point out opportunities and dangers associated with advances in science and technology.

Yet, more than ever before, the work of scientists is occurring in a very dynamic and highly politically charged environment. The growing interdependence among science, government, and industry, and the increasing power of technology to alter the natural environment have raised persistent questions about the effects of scientific discovery, as well as the professional and social responsibilities of scientists.

When engaged in deliberations on public policy, it is critical that scientists maintain their professional integrity. Scientists, like all professionals, value autonomy--the freedom to pursue their work without undue external intrusion. But the privileges associated with autonomy conferred on professionals by society carry a concomitant responsibility on the part of scientists to ensure that they share a commitment to the highest standards of ethical practice and the resolve to live up to them.

Over the past years a number of incidents have highlighted the misuse of scientific research and evidence in policymaking. Even when scientists act responsibly, studies can still be subject to politicization and manipulation. Examples of this interference include nonscientists altering scientific findings, the suppression of scientific findings by public officials, and undue restrictions on scientists' ability to speak about their research and its social significance.

Let's be clear. Ignorance, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation are no friends of science. Although science will be only one of several factors to inform and influence public policymaking, and not necessarily, if ever, be determinative, it ought to be as correct as it can be, untainted by distortion, manipulation, and suppression.

It is useful to view science as a "community of common purpose," which enables scientists to think beyond their own self-interests to the application of their knowledge and skills to the greater social good. The Professionals for the Public Interest Coalition is an even larger community, bringing the power of a coalition of professional groups in common purpose to the service of society. The Coalition will provide a platform for professional communities to share information and best practices for strengthening and promoting professional integrity. Additionally, it will provide a voice for professionals in many fields of study that address critical societal issues. AAAS looks forward to working with other members of the coalition to advance the public interest.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of *Science* (www.sciencemag.org). AAAS was founded in 1848 and includes 262 affiliated societies and academies of science, serving 10 million individuals. *Science* has the largest paid circulation of any peer-reviewed general science journal in the world, with an estimated total readership of one million. The non-profit AAAS (www.aaas.org) is open to all and fulfills its mission to "advance science and serve society" through initiatives in science education, science policy, international programs, and an array of activities designed both to increase public understanding and engage the public with science.

###