In his March 2021 report "The undermining of science is Trump's legacy" (page 24), David Kramer conflates science itself with his personal preference for the government planning of scientific research. They are two different things.

Throughout the piece, Kramer smuggles in his own value judgments about what governments should do regarding science. For combating climate change, for example, he ranks the 2015 Paris Agreement highly. Another person with the same understanding of and appreciation for climate science might prefer, for whatever reason, that governments do the opposite of what Kramer wants. (Murray Rothbard's essay "Law, property rights, and air pollution" provides insight into environmentalism without interventionism.[1])

Similar implied value judgments hold for Kramer's comments on federal budgets and workforce: It is not interfering with scientific research to cut federal funding. Tax-funded research funnels resources into what Kramer ostensibly deems important. But all goods are scarce, so what is the opportunity cost—that is, what scientific research is not performed in other areas? No one can say. Kramer is suggesting that governments should determine the amount and direction of societal spending on scientific research, and others may simply have different opinions.

Kramer's report is not about undermining objective science itself. Rather, it is a description of the high subjective value he places on government-directed scientific research.

Reference

1. M. N. Rothbard, *Cato J.* **2**, 55 (1982).

Christopher Barsi
Lee, New Hampshire

CONTACT PHYSICS TODAY

Letters and commentary are encouraged and should be sent by email to **ptletters@aip.org** (using your surname as the Subject line), or by standard mail to Letters, PHYSICS TODAY, American Center for Physics, One Physics Ellipse, College Park, MD 20740-3842. Please include your name, work affiliation, mailing address, email address, and daytime phone number on your letter and attachments. You can also contact us online at **https://contact.physicstoday.org**. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

If I have learned anything about scientific writing in my 35-year career, it is that scientists should be careful when writing on matters of politics and public policy. We tend to be too cocksure of our own thinly vetted opinions and present them poorly to boot. David Kramer's report "The undermining of science is Trump's legacy" (March 2021, page 24) is an unfortunate example.

For starters, facts presented in the piece do not support the title. About a full page in, Kramer admits that funding for science increased 10–20% under Donald Trump. That does not undermine science.

The story quotes representative Bill Foster (D-IL), who has a PhD in physics, on the "searing pain" of the Trump years. A check of Foster's record shows that in the 2019–20 Congress he voted with Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) 100% of the time. His credentials as a physicist notwithstanding, his opinion is better understood politically, not scientifically.

The story makes several egregious assertions without any backing. For example, Kramer writes that "Trump sidelined Anthony Fauci . . . and Deborah Birx . . . . In their place, he installed Scott Atlas, a radiologist who argued that the virus should be allowed to spread largely unimpeded." That is a bizarre take on the facts! Fauci, not Atlas, was, and is, the governmental face of the pandemic response. And has there ever been a more aggressive effort to impede the spread of a virus? Most any unbiased individual would applaud Trump for seeking a variety of opinions. The ideas of Atlas—who is much more than "a radiologist"[1]—were neither flippant nor influential.

Kramer states that "an indisputable legacy of the Trump administration was an unparalleled level of political interference with science—data disappeared, scientists were silenced, ..." Those are serious charges, but the lack of examples to back them up suggests to the thoughtful reader that there are no indisputable examples to give. Kramer's "most far-reaching example of attempted interference" apparently centers on the Harvard Six Cities study on pollution and health and its reliance on confidential raw data. That controversy started in 2009 and extended through the Obama years;[2] it is hardly a Trump-era issue.

In fairness to Kramer, the Six Cities study was reviewed by an independent panel that agreed with its results. In