

Physicians for Social Responsibility
Natural Resources Defense Council
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Support and Education for Radiation Victims
Committee to Bridge the Gap
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Physicians for Social Responsibility-San Francisco Bay Area

July 22, 2021

Ourania Kosti
Senior Program Officer
Nuclear and Radiation Studies Board
National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine

by email to: OKosti@nas.edu

Dear Dr. Kosti:

We write to object strongly to the provisional appointment of John D. Graham to the National Academies' Committee on Developing a Long-Term Strategy for Low-Dose Radiation Research in the United States. Graham lacks radiation expertise, has spent decades pushing for weakening of environmental and public health protections, and has a long record of conflicts of interest and advancing positions of industry funders. Thus Graham's addition to the committee would provide neither a balanced perspective nor technical expertise relevant to this committee, and his membership thereon would be inappropriate. What follows is a brief history of Graham's troubled track record. We urge you to remove John D. Graham from the provisional committee membership.

In one of George W. Bush's most controversial nominations, Graham was named to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), where he energetically worked to gut existing environmental and public health regulations while blocking new ones, winning plaudits from polluting industries and condemnation from environmental and public health groups.

So troubling was this nomination that it was opposed by a group of 53 academics¹ who wrote that:

Professor Graham's controversial risk management methodology discounts the real risks of well-documented pollutants such as dioxin and benzene, and makes use of extreme and highly-disputed economic assumptions. Professor Graham has shown his willingness to over-ride health, safety, environmental, civil rights, and other social goals in applying crude cost-benefit tools far past the point at which they can be justified by existing scientific and economic data.

In his statements to the media and Congress, he has undermined regulatory efforts by understating many of the potential benefits of health, safety and environmental regulation and overstating their costs. Moreover, Professor Graham has publicly rendered many opinions on complex and imperfectly understood scientific phenomena, such as the etiology of cancer and other diseases, despite his lack of a degree in the hard sciences.

Graham's work has, overall, demonstrated a remarkable congruency with the interests of regulated industries.

We also have serious concerns about Professor Graham's disregard for widely-accepted fundraising and research norms within academia. He has solicited and accepted unrestricted funds from corporations with a direct financial interest in particular regulatory issues addressed by his work, without acknowledging the role of his corporate benefactors. Unlike many research scientists, he has often operated without the guidance of restricted-funding contracts designed to minimize conflicts of interest and to protect credibility and public trust.

As the U.S. Public Interest Research Group said in its opposition to his OIRA nomination²:

Overwhelming opposition to Dr. Graham reflects deep concern regarding his pattern of pushing controversial and unsupported theories, combined with his failure to disclose financial conflicts of interests. In constructing his positions on regulatory affairs, Dr. Graham has employed dubious methodologies and assumptions, utilized inflated cost estimates, and failed to fully consider the benefits of safeguards to public health, consumers and the environment. Dr. Graham has used these tools when dealing with the media to distort issues related to well-established dangers, including cancer-causing chemicals (such as benzene), the clean up of toxic waste sites (including Love Canal), and the dangers of pesticides in food. In each instance, Mr. Graham's public statements failed to include an admission that he was being paid by corporate interests with a financial stake in rulemaking related to those topics.

¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20090206014125/https://www.citizen.org/congress/regulations/graham/academics.html>

² <https://web.archive.org/web/20090206013942/https://www.citizen.org/congress/regulations/graham/pirgletter.html>

Similarly, the Trump Administration, as part of an effort to purge the EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) of neutral scientists and pack it instead with people with strong industry ties, first named Graham to the SAB and then, shortly before the 2020 election, as Chair of the SAB. As the Union of Concerned Scientists put it in "Who *Not* to Pick for EPA's Science Advisory Board"³:

Before his stint at OMB, Graham led the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, which notably skewed risk analyses in favor of industry: costs saved by not regulating versus lives saved regulating. In one case, Graham's OMB rejected a National Highway Transportation Safety Administration rule that would reduce the toll of vehicle rollovers by requiring that automakers install tire pressure warning systems. Graham made this decision despite the direct conflict of interest as his Harvard think tank [was funded by](#) General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co., Volvo Car Corp. and the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

The new EPA Administrator, Michael Regan, in an effort to undo some of the damage to science that occurred during the Trump Administration, has removed Graham from his SAB post.⁴

Before his time as head of OIRA at OMB, Graham was the controversial founder and director of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis. Heavily funded by industry while publishing studies lauded by industry that attacked environmental and health regulations, his work was widely criticized for its apparent conflicts of interest, and failure to disclose such conflicts. The *New York Times* wrote:

Dr. David Ozonoff, chairman of the department of environmental health at Boston University's School of Public Health ... said that much of the research carried out at Dr. Graham's Harvard Center for Risk Analysis has amounted to "having the client shoot an arrow, and then the analyst paints a target around it." Sixty percent of the center's annual budget of \$3 million comes from private gifts and grants, most of them from industry trade organizations and large companies, including Monsanto, ExxonMobil, 3M, Alcoa, Pfizer, Dow Chemical and DuPont. The center's reports have tended to reflect the view of industry, as in a study last summer, sponsored by AT&T Wireless Communication, that concluded that the hazards of talking on a cell phone while driving were relatively small. In the early 1990's, Dr. Graham solicited money from Philip Morris at a time when he was criticizing the E.P.A.'s conclusion that second-hand smoke was a carcinogen, people close to him said. Accepting tobacco money violated the policy of the School of Public Health, of which the risk-analysis center is a part, and Dr. Graham was ordered to return the money. He later accepted an equivalent gift from Kraft, a Philip Morris subsidiary, the same people said."⁵

There is significant pressure from the nuclear power industry and the nuclear weapons complex, and those allied with them, to downplay the risks to human health from ionizing radiation. A key part of this

³ <https://blog.ucsusa.org/genna-reed/who-not-to-pick-for-the-epas-science-advisory-board/> September 26, 2017

⁴ Dino Grandoni, "EPA Dismisses Dozens of Science Advisors Picked Under Trump; The Biden Administration Says it Needs to Restore Trust in the Agency by 'Resetting' Membership on Two Key Science Advisory Panels," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/03/31/epa-advisory-panels/>

⁵ Douglas Jehl, "Regulations Czar Prefers New Path," *New York Times*, March 25, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/25/us/regulations-czar-prefers-new-path.html?searchResultPosition=1>

involves a campaign to declare that there is a threshold of dose below which there is no risk, and even some who claim that such radiation doses are good for you (“hormesis”). While the scientific data do not support such assertions, any study that is supposed to identify a strategy for research on such a controversial topic needs to maintain a very high degree of integrity and credibility. The appointment of John Graham to such a panel would pose an insurmountable obstacle to those goals. We therefore respectfully urge that his provisional appointment to this committee be withdrawn.

Sincerely,

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