

77 US Nobel Laureates in Science

May 21, 2020

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Collins:

The 77 signatories of this letter, American Nobel Laureates in Physiology or Medicine, Chemistry, and Physics, are gravely concerned about the recent cancellation of a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to Dr. Peter Daszak at the EcoHealth Alliance in New York. We believe that this action sets a dangerous precedent by interfering in the conduct of science and jeopardizes public trust in the process of awarding federal funds for research.

For many years, Dr. Daszak and his colleagues have been conducting highly regarded, NIH-supported research on coronaviruses and other infectious agents, focusing on the transmission of these viruses from animal hosts to human beings. Their work depends on productive collaborations with scientists in other countries, including scientists in Wuhan, China, where the current pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus arose. Now is precisely the time when we need to support this kind of research if we aim to control the pandemic and prevent subsequent ones.

As has now been widely reported, the grant to the EcoHealth Alliance was abruptly terminated by NIH on April 24, 2020, just a few days after President Trump responded to a question from a reporter who erroneously claimed that the grant awarded millions of dollars to investigators in Wuhan. Despite the misrepresentation of Dr. Daszak's grant, despite the high relevance of the studies to the current pandemic, and despite the very high priority score that his application for renewal had received during peer review, the NIH informed Dr. Daszak and his colleagues that the grant was being terminated because "NIH does not believe that the current project outcomes align with the program goals and agency priorities." Such explanations are preposterous under the circumstances.

We are scientists who have devoted our careers to research, both in medical and related scientific disciplines that bear on the overall health and well-being of society, as well as fundamental scientific research, much of it supported by NIH and other federal agencies. We take pride in our nation's widely admired system for allocating funds based on expert review and public health needs. The abrupt revoking of the award to Dr. Daszak contravenes these basic tenets and deprives the nation and the world of highly regarded science that could help control one of the greatest health crises in modern history and those that may arise in the future.

We ask that you act urgently to conduct and release a thorough review of the actions that led to the decision to terminate the grant, and that, following this review, you take appropriate steps to rectify the injustices that may have been committed in revoking it.

Peter Agre	Chemistry	2003	James P. Allison	Medicine	2018
Sidney Altman	Chemistry	1989	Frances H. Arnold	Chemistry	2018
David Baltimore	Medicine	1975	Barry Clark Barish	Physics	2017
Paul Berg	Chemistry	1980	J. Michael Bishop	Medicine	1989
Elizabeth H. Blackburn	Medicine	2009	Michael S. Brown	Medicine	1985
William C. Campbell	Medicine	2015	Mario R. Capecchi	Medicine	2007
Thomas R. Cech	Chemistry	1989	Martin Chalfie	Chemistry	2008
Steven Chu	Physics	1997	Elias James Corey	Chemistry	1990
Robert F. Curl Jr.	Chemistry	1996	Johann Deisenhofer	Chemistry	1988
Andrew Z. Fire	Medicine	2006	Edmond H. Fischer	Medicine	1992
Joachim Frank	Chemistry	2017	Jerome I. Friedman	Physics	1990
Walter Gilbert	Chemistry	1980	Sheldon Glashow	Physics	1979
Joseph L. Goldstein	Medicine	1985	Carol W. Greider	Medicine	2009
David J. Gross	Physics	2004	Roger Guillemin	Medicine	1977
Leland H. Hartwell	Medicine	2001	Dudley R. Herschbach	Chemistry	1986
Roald Hoffmann	Chemistry	1981	H. Robert Horvitz	Medicine	2002
Louis J. Ignarro	Medicine	1998	William G. Kaelin Jr.	Medicine	2019
Eric R. Kandel	Medicine	2000	Wolfgang Ketterle	Physics	2001
Brian K. Kobilka	Chemistry	2012	Roger D. Kornberg	Chemistry	2006
Robert J. Lefkowitz	Chemistry	2012	Anthony J. Leggett	Physics	2003
Michael Levitt	Chemistry	2013	Roderick MacKinnon	Chemistry	2003
John C. Mather	Physics	2006	Craig C. Mello	Medicine	2006
William E. Moerner	Chemistry	2014	Mario J. Molina	Chemistry	1995
Ferid Murad	Medicine	1998	Douglas D. Osheroff	Physics	1996

James Peebles	Physics	2019	Saul Perlmutter	Physics	2011
William D. Phillips	Physics	1997	H. David Politzer	Physics	2004
Sir Richard J. Roberts	Medicine	1993	Michael Rosbash	Medicine	2017
James E. Rothman	Medicine	2013	Randy W. Schekman	Medicine	2013
Richard R. Schrock	Chemistry	2005	Gregg L. Semenza	Medicine	2019
Phillip A. Sharp	Medicine	1993	Hamilton O. Smith	Medicine	1978
George P. Smith	Chemistry	2018	Horst L. Stormer	Physics	1998
Thomas C. Sudhof	Medicine	2013	Jack W. Szostak	Medicine	2009
Joseph H. Taylor Jr.	Physics	1993	Kip Stephen Thorne	Physics	2017
Susumu Tonegawa	Medicine	1987	Daniel C. Tsui	Physics	1998
Harold E. Varmus	Medicine	1989	Steve Weinberg	Physics	1979
Rainer Weiss	Physics	2017	Carl E. Wieman	Physics	2001
Eric F. Wieschaus	Medicine	1995	Torsten N. Wiesel	Medicine	1981
Frank Wilczek	Physics	2004	Robert Woodrow Wilson	Physics	1978
Michael W. Young	Medicine	2017			