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**THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH II**

# **When Science Gets Political**

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Scientists are citizens, like everybody else. They can protest and support and do all things citizens do. The important distinction is when they use their scientific knowledge to achieve political ends.

Before the Cold War ended, scientists typically did basic research with little regard to its political consequences, putting the results of research into a reservoir of knowledge that people could tap into. If a scientist wanted to become political, as happened with some of the nuclear scientists, he or she did it outside science.

Today we see a subset of scientists trying to use their science to affect political outcomes. The most obvious example is with the Kyoto protocol on global warming, where scientists are arrayed on both sides of the debate. What policy makers need from scientists is not support for or against the protocol, but practical alternatives to deal with climate change. The protocol is more a symbol than a proposal for a real solution.

We need more scientists to play role of honest broker, to give decision makers a range of choices, rather than to push narrow alternatives in situations where science doesn't offer a single solution. Mixing politics and science is a risky strategy. The Bush administration might look at this and say if scientists are politicizing science, why shouldn't we. If scientists are protesting the administration's appointments to health advisory committees, they should do so because the politicization of science is a bad thing, not because the appointees they are protesting happen to hold different political views from their own.

- Roger A. Pielke Jr.

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