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## At a Scientific Gathering, U.S. Policies Are Lamented

By [CORNELIA DEAN](#)

ST. LOUIS, Feb. 18 — David Baltimore, the Nobel Prize-winning biologist and president of the California Institute of Technology, is used to the Bush administration misrepresenting scientific findings to support its policy aims, he told an audience of fellow researchers Saturday. Each time it happens, he said, "I shrug and say, 'What do you expect?'"

But then, Dr. Baltimore went on, he began to read about the administration's embrace of the theory of the unitary executive, the idea that the executive branch has the power or even the obligation to act without restraint from Congress. And he began to see in a new light widely reported episodes of government scientists being restricted in what they could say in public.

"It's no accident that we are seeing such an extensive suppression of scientific freedom," he said. "It's part of the theory of government now, and it's a theory we need to vociferously oppose." Far from twisting science to suit its own goals, he said, the government should be "the guardian of intellectual freedom."

Dr. Baltimore spoke at a session here at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Though it was organized too late for inclusion in the overall meeting catalogue, the session drew hundreds of scientists who crowded a large meeting room and applauded enthusiastically as speakers denounced administration policies they said threatened not just sound science but also the nation's research pre-eminence.

The session was organized by the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit organization that has been highly critical of the Bush administration.

Not all of the speakers had harsh words for the administration. Rita R. Colwell, who headed the National Science Foundation, the government's leading financing organization for the physical sciences, from 1998 to 2004, said she had never experienced political pressure in that job. But, Dr. Colwell said, the free flow of scientific information is crucial for maintaining the nation's leadership in research. Threats to that, she said, are second only to terrorism as threats to the nation's security.

Another speaker, Susan F. Wood, former director of the office of women's health at the Food and Drug Administration, said administration interference with the agency's scientific and regulatory processes had left morale there at a "nadir."

Dr. Wood, who received a standing ovation from many in the audience, resigned in August to protest agency officials' unusual decision to overrule an expert panel and withhold marketing approval for Plan B, the so-called morning after pill, a form of emergency contraception. She said she feared that competent scientists would leave rather than remain at an agency where their work was ignored because "social conservatives have extreme undue influence."

Later, in response to a question, she said that she might have consulted the agency's inspector general over the Plan B decision, but that inspectors general often had to be prodded by Congress before taking action. Democrats have little power in this Congress, she said, and Republicans who care about science have been "remarkably silent."

Others in the audience said efforts to stifle researchers were attacks on more than science.

"Administrative legitimacy has been violated as much as scientific legitimacy," said Sheila Jasanoff, an expert on science policy who teaches at the [John F. Kennedy](#) School of Government at Harvard. "You can't get the most solid possible basis for making a decision unless you have not just the most credible and legitimate form of science but also the most credible and legitimate administrative process."

Leslie Sussan, a lawyer with the Department of Health and Human Services who emphasized that she was speaking only for herself, drew applause when she said she saw the administration's science policies as "an attack on the rule of law as a basis for self-government and democracy."