

WHO DECIDES WHAT IS AND IS NOT SCIENCE?

Joe Carvalko

Congress soon will reauthorize the National Science Foundation, the federal agency charged with enabling the U.S. to uphold a position of world leadership in research. They may institute a substantial reduction in funding for social science research, because they somehow do not think it as worthy as research into the “hard sciences.” The second concern I have is the addition of a layer of review to ensure any research is “worthy of federal funding” and “in the national interest.” This determination is of course subject to political forces.

Congress needs to understand that the science is a method for conducting investigations that are subject to empirical observation, regardless whether caused by nature or caused by human behavior. Science provides the engine with which we might: objectively link research to relevant theory; provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning; replicate and generalize across studies; disclose research to encourage scrutiny and critique.

We cannot ignore that we live in a time of great world division: social, religious, political, and moral. The moral divide does not cut across political, religious, or ethnic borders as much as it cuts across sectors within societies that live in moral uncertainty. Science helps us understand the forces that shape these differences.

We need to foster scientific programs, not only those that explores the regions of physics and chemistry (the hard sciences), but those that investigate the underlying causes for war, poverty, bigotry and a myriad of numerable man-made scourges. Time has come to call out members of Congress who want to keep their head in the sand, because they believe that remaining in office is more important than science-based social and technological advances that might bring order out of chaos and reason out of ignorance.