Policy, Politics, and Purity: An Analysis of the Trump Administration's Science Agenda and its Impact on the Million Veteran Program

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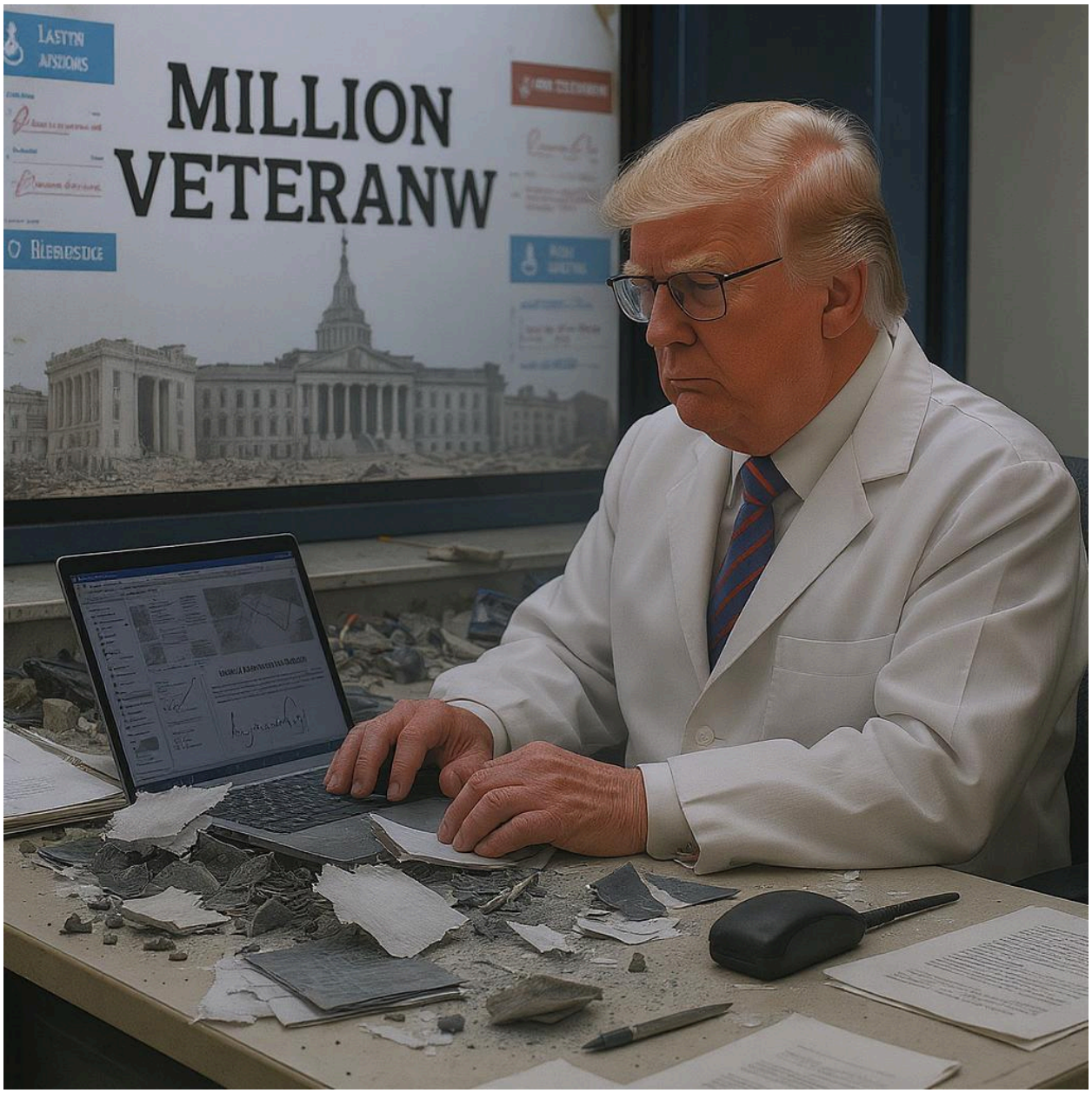

Introduction

The relationship between science and governance in the United States has historically been one of symbiotic, if sometimes tense, partnership. Since the mid-20th century, a robust federal investment in research and development has fueled innovation, economic growth, and public health advancements, establishing a global standard for scientific leadership. However, this consensus is not immutable. It is subject to the shifting tides of political ideology, budgetary priorities, and public trust. In this context, the Salon article by Heather Digby Parton, "Donald Trump goes nuclear in the GOP's war on science," serves as a potent articulation of a narrative that has gained significant traction: that the second Trump administration is engaged in a systematic and unprecedented campaign to dismantle the American scientific enterprise.[1] Parton frames this as the culmination of a long-simmering ideological conflict, now reaching a critical and destructive phase.

This report undertakes a rigorous, evidence-based examination of the policies, personnel, and budgetary priorities that constitute the Trump administration's science agenda. The primary objective is to move beyond the rhetoric of a "war on science" to assess the tangible mechanisms of policy change and their real-world consequences. By deconstructing the central claims of the Parton article and substantiating the analysis with documented administrative actions across key federal agencies, this report seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the administration's approach to science. The methodology involves a multi-pronged analysis: a critical evaluation of the ideological underpinnings of the administration's agenda, a systematic documentation of budgetary and regulatory actions, and a detailed case study of a flagship federal research program caught in the political crosscurrents.

To ground this analysis in concrete reality, this report uses the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Million Veteran Program (MVP) as its central and most critical case study. Described by a former VA Secretary as a "crown jewel of the country," the MVP represents a monumental investment in the future of medicine, a globally significant biorepository built on the altruism of over one million American veterans.[2] It is a source of immense national pride and scientific potential, promising to unlock the genetic secrets of diseases that affect veterans and the general population alike, from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and cancer to heart disease and diabetes.[4] The MVP thus serves as an ideal litmus test for measuring the tangible consequences of high-level policy decisions. Its vulnerability to budgetary shortfalls, administrative

neglect, and ideological shifts makes it a powerful lens through which to view the broader impact of the administration's agenda, revealing how a program designed to be a beacon of scientific progress can be imperiled by the very government that created it.

Section 1: Deconstructing the "War on Science" Narrative

The discourse surrounding the Trump administration's science policy is often framed in martial terms, with Heather Digby Parton's Salon article providing a stark example. Her central thesis posits that the administration's actions are not isolated policy shifts but a "nuclear" escalation in a long-standing "war on science" waged by the American right.[1] This section will critically analyze the core arguments of Parton's narrative, using the available evidence to evaluate the validity of her claims regarding the administration's motivations, personnel choices, and specific actions.

Parton's Central Thesis

Parton argues that the current administration's approach represents the culmination of a century-long ideological battle against scientific rationalism, a conflict she traces back to the Scopes trial. This intermittent assault, she contends, coalesced into an "all-out war" in the 1980s with the rise of the religious right, manifesting in opposition to AIDS research, stem cell studies, climate science, and COVID-19 public health measures. In her view, the Trump administration's agenda—characterized by devastating cuts to research, agencies, and staff—is a deliberate effort to reverse decades of scientific progress and return the nation to an era of profound scientific skepticism.[1]

Evaluating the Ideological Drivers

The report now examines the four primary motivations Parton identifies as fueling this "war," cross-referencing her claims with documented administration policies and

priorities.

Religious Fundamentalism: Parton asserts that for many on the right, suspicion of science is rooted in religious fundamentalism, particularly the perceived conflict between evolutionary theory and biblical creationism.[1] While direct evidence of this specific conflict driving policy is not prominent in the research, the administration's broader alignment with socially conservative and religious priorities is clear. The President's budget, for instance, explicitly states that it "protects life and prevents a pro-abortion agenda from being promoted abroad with taxpayer dollars".[6] Furthermore, the appointment of figures who appeal to a socially conservative base, and the broader "culture war" framing of many policy debates, suggests that this ideological undercurrent is a significant, if not always explicit, factor in the administration's worldview.

Fealty to Industry: A more direct line can be drawn between Parton's claim of loyalty to industries like fossil fuels and the administration's policy actions.[1] This assertion is strongly substantiated by the fiscal year 2026 appropriations bill for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior advanced by House Republicans and reflecting White House priorities. The bill's summary explicitly states its goals are to "unleash American energy" and champion "American energy dominance." It achieves this by promoting domestic mining, requiring onshore and offshore oil and gas lease sales, and prohibiting the use of the "social cost of carbon," a key metric for quantifying the long-term damage of greenhouse gas emissions that has "stymied new development".[7] These actions directly align with the interests of the fossil fuel industry by removing regulatory hurdles and prioritizing resource extraction over environmental protection, lending significant weight to Parton's argument.

Fiscal Conservatism and Anti-Government Sentiment: Parton's argument that a powerful faction aims to slash taxes and dismantle public sector support for science is overwhelmingly supported by the administration's fiscal policy.[1] The President's discretionary budget request for fiscal year 2026 proposes cutting base non-defense discretionary budget authority by $163 billion, or 22.6 percent, below current spending levels.[6] This overarching goal translates into dramatic proposed cuts for nearly every major scientific agency, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the EPA.[9] The administration's use of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), an entity tasked with identifying budget cuts, to target research contracts at the VA and other agencies underscores this drive for austerity.[12] Moreover, the push to privatize veteran medical care by transferring billions to private hospitals—a stated goal of Project 2025 now being enacted in the military

construction and VA funding bill—is a clear manifestation of this anti-government, pro-market ideology.[14]

The administration's strategy is not merely about reducing spending but also about fundamentally altering the mechanisms of funding. The use of the Impoundment Control Act (ICA) to request rescissions of already-appropriated funds is a telling maneuver. This strategy allows for expedited consideration in the Senate with a lower vote threshold, effectively attempting to circumvent the established appropriations process to achieve long-desired cuts that would likely fail under normal legislative rules.[12] This represents a sophisticated and aggressive application of anti-government and fiscally conservative principles.

Assessing the Critique of Key Appointments

A cornerstone of Parton's argument is that the administration has installed a new guard of leaders who are fundamentally hostile to the scientific establishment she describes as "august scientific institutions".[1] She characterizes the appointees for key health and science posts as a "dangerous conspiracy theorist" (Robert F. Kennedy Jr.), a "quack cure TV huckster" (Dr. Mehmet Oz), an "eccentric contrarian" (Dr. Marty Makary), and an "ethically-challenged partisan" (Dr. Jay Bhattacharya). An examination of their backgrounds and confirmations reveals substantial evidence to support these critical characterizations.

The confirmation of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) on a narrow 52-48 vote is perhaps the most salient example.[15] Kennedy is the founder of Children's Health Defense, an organization known for its legal challenges against vaccine requirements and approvals.[15] His nomination drew fierce opposition from Democrats and, notably, from Republican Senator Mitch McConnell, a polio survivor. McConnell cited Kennedy's "record of trafficking in dangerous conspiracy theories and eroding trust in public health institutions" as his reason for voting against the nominee.[15] The confirmation of a figure with such a prominent history of anti-vaccine advocacy to lead the nation's public health apparatus directly validates Parton's assertion that the administration is elevating figures with views far outside the scientific mainstream.

The appointment of Dr. Mehmet Oz to lead the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) also aligns with Parton's critique. While Oz is a credentialed heart

surgeon, his long career as a television personality was marked by controversy.[17] In 2014, he was called before a Senate subcommittee on consumer protection and chastised for promoting weight-loss products that lacked robust scientific evidence. Senator Claire McCaskill questioned why he would "cheapen" his show with such endorsements, to which Oz admitted that the products often did not have the "scientific muster to present as fact".[18] His confirmation to run an agency that oversees the health coverage of nearly half the country, despite this public record of promoting scientifically questionable products, lends credence to Parton's "huckster" label.

The appointments of Dr. Marty Makary as FDA Commissioner and Dr. Jay Bhattacharya as NIH Director fit the "contrarian" and "partisan" molds Parton describes. Both were prominent and vocal critics of the public health establishment's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[19] Dr. Bhattacharya, a Stanford health economist, was a co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration, which advocated against lockdowns and was heavily criticized by mainstream public health leaders at the time, including the former NIH Director.[22] Dr. Makary, a surgeon from Johns Hopkins, was also a critic of vaccine mandates and prolonged school closures.[19] Their elevation to the highest positions at the FDA and NIH, respectively, signals a clear administrative endorsement of their dissenting views and a desire to install leaders who are prepared to challenge the institutional orthodoxy of the agencies they now lead.

Evaluating Claims of Specific Harm

Parton's article moves from general critique to specific examples of harm, most notably the charge that the new leadership is "strangling research into mRNA vaccines" out of allegiance to "crank conspiracy theories".[1] This is not mere hyperbole. The claim is directly corroborated by reports that the NIH, under its new leadership, has moved to cancel $766 million in contracts intended to develop mRNA vaccines against potential pandemic flu viruses.[1] Furthermore, the NIH is reportedly dismissing dozens of grant reviewers with expertise in mRNA research, creating a vacuum of knowledge that will hinder the assessment of future proposals in this critical field.[1] This specific action is part of a broader pattern of targeting ideologically disfavored research topics. Across the federal government, grants mentioning terms like "race or gender," "health equity," "misinformation," and "vaccine hesitancy" have been systematically targeted for termination.[10] At the NIH alone, well over $3 billion in grants

have been cancelled, with these topics being particularly vulnerable.[10]

This pattern reveals that Parton's "war on science" metaphor, while provocative, captures a crucial aspect of the administration's strategy. This is not simply a matter of budgetary austerity; it is a conflict of narratives. The administration is not merely defunding science but is actively working to redefine what it considers to be legitimate scientific inquiry and who it deems to be a legitimate scientific authority. By installing figures like Kennedy and Bhattacharya, who command significant public followings, the administration is attempting to supplant the authority of traditional institutions like the NIH and CDC with a new cadre of experts whose views align with its political and ideological objectives. This represents a fundamental battle for public trust and the very definition of scientific truth.

Furthermore, the "war" metaphor accurately reflects the multi-front nature of the administration's approach. The evidence points to a coordinated and systemic campaign rather than a series of isolated or random actions. The EPA faces a combination of deep budget cuts and regulatory rollbacks designed to benefit industry.[7] The NIH and NSF face a parallel assault of budget cuts and the targeted cancellation of ideologically "disfavored" grants.[9] NASA is confronting proposed staff and budget cuts that threaten its core scientific and exploration missions.[25] And, as the central case study of this report will show, the VA's research arm is facing a slow strangulation through bureaucratic and administrative maneuvers.[2] This consistency of purpose across disparate agencies suggests a coherent, strategic campaign to reshape the federal scientific landscape in its entirety.

Section 2: The Architecture of Scientific Curtailment: Policy, Personnel, and Pursestrings

The administration's reshaping of the federal science landscape is not being executed through a single policy but through a sophisticated, multi-pronged strategy that leverages budgetary power, regulatory authority, and personnel appointments. This section provides a systematic, evidence-based overview of these mechanisms, detailing how the administration is constructing an architecture of scientific curtailment. This approach can be understood as a "pincer movement" against the scientific establishment: simultaneously starving agencies of financial resources from

below while imposing a new ideological framework and system of control from above.

The Power of the Purse: A Cross-Agency Analysis of Budgetary Reshaping

The most direct and powerful tool for influencing the direction of science is the federal budget. The administration's budget proposals reveal a clear intent to dramatically reduce federal investment in non-defense-related scientific research. The scale of the proposed cuts is staggering and consistent across major science-funding agencies.

The White House's fiscal year 2026 budget request calls for a 40% cut to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the world's largest funder of biomedical research, which would slash its budget by $18 billion.[9] The National Science Foundation (NSF), the primary funder of basic research in the non-medical sciences, faces a proposed 57% cut.[10] NASA's budget is targeted for a 25% reduction, with its science programs facing an even more severe 47% cut.[10] The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is slated for a reduction of more than 50% under the President's plan.[11] These proposals represent a fundamental reordering of national priorities, shifting resources away from science, health, and the environment and toward defense and homeland security, which are slated for significant increases.[6]

While Congress holds the ultimate power of the purse, and the appropriations bills emerging from the House of Representatives have moderated some of the administration's most extreme requests, they still represent a dramatic downsizing of the scientific enterprise. For example, the House GOP bill proposes a 23% cut for both the EPA and the NSF—less than the White House's 50-57% proposed cuts, but still a massive reduction that would cripple many research programs.[8] This dynamic reveals both the extremity of the administration's position and the fact that even the more "moderate" congressional stance entails a historic contraction of federal science funding.

Agency	FY2025 Enacted Level	FY2026 Trump Admin. Proposal	FY2026 House GOP Bill	Source(s)
NIH	~$47.5B	~$27.5B (-40% /	TBD	[9]

	(implied)	-$18B)		
NSF	~$9.9B (implied)	~$4.3B (-57%)	~$7.6B (-23%)	[10]
EPA	~$9.1B	~$4.2B (> -50%)	~$7.0B (-23% / -$2.1B)	[11]
NASA	~$24.9B (overall)	Overall cut of ~25%	Flat overall funding	[11]
NASA Science	~$7.3B	~$3.9B (-47%)	Reductions included	[10]
Table 1: Proposed vs. Enacted FY2026 Budget Changes for Key Science Agencies. Note: Some figures are derived from reported percentages and may be approximate.				

Beyond direct budget proposals, the administration is employing sophisticated and legally questionable bureaucratic maneuvers to block spending even after it has been appropriated by Congress. This demonstrates a willingness to weaponize administrative processes to achieve policy goals that are legislatively unattainable. One such tactic involves the use of the Impoundment Control Act (ICA) to request rescissions of previously approved funding. This is noteworthy because the administration has previously asserted that it believes the ICA is unconstitutional, yet it is using the act's provision for expedited Senate consideration, which requires a lower vote threshold, to push through cuts that would likely fail to achieve the 60 votes needed under standard procedure.[12]

An even more novel and aggressive strategy is being deployed at the EPA. There, the administration is attempting to "de-obligate" billions of dollars in grant funds for which the agency has already signed binding contracts. The strategy involves using routine administrative authorities—typically reserved for cancelling individual contracts due to non-performance—to cancel hundreds of grant agreements en masse, particularly

those related to climate change and environmental justice that the administration deems no longer match its priorities.[26] The "de-obligated" funds are then made available for rescission by Congress. Legal experts have questioned whether this broad application of narrow administrative authorities violates federal anti-impoundment law, which restricts a president's ability to arbitrarily withhold or cancel spending mandated by Congress.[26] This tactic represents a deliberate effort to circumvent the separation of powers and undermine the will of the legislature.

Redefining the Rules: "Gold Standard Science" and the Remaking of Scientific Integrity

The second prong of the administration's pincer movement is the imposition of ideological control through the redefinition of scientific standards and integrity. The primary vehicle for this is the May 2025 Executive Order on "Restoring Gold Standard Science".[27] On its face, the order promotes laudable principles: that science should be reproducible, transparent, falsifiable, collaborative, and free from conflicts of interest.[27] However, the implementation details and the broader context reveal a different agenda, one that critics argue is designed to sideline entire fields of research and centralize political control over the scientific process.

A key and highly contentious provision of the "Gold Standard" order is the requirement that agencies make public all "data, analyses, and conclusions" associated with any scientific information they use in major decisions.[28] Critics immediately identified this as a revival of the first Trump administration's so-called "Secret Science" rule.[29] This policy effectively disqualifies a vast body of crucial public health and environmental research, such as epidemiological studies that rely on confidential patient health data that cannot legally or ethically be made public. By mandating a level of transparency that is impossible for many foundational studies to meet, the rule provides a pretext for ignoring scientific evidence that might support regulations opposed by the administration and its industry allies.

This EO also explicitly revokes all scientific integrity policies implemented during the Biden administration.[29] This includes the specific and formal rescission of the NIH's scientific integrity policy in March 2025.[31] That policy, which had only gone into effect at the end of 2024, was designed to protect federal scientists from political interference and retaliation. Crucially, it also stated that "diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are integral components of the entire scientific process" and

directed support for LGBTQIA+ researchers.[31] The rescission notice justified the move as necessary "to ensure alignment" with the current administration's priorities, which include a government-wide executive order to terminate all DEIA-related activities.[31]

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the "Gold Standard" framework is its enforcement mechanism. The order directs that the new policies will be enforced through "internal processes" administered by a "senior appointee" within each agency.[29] This structure shifts oversight from career scientists and established scientific integrity officers to political figures. A group of nearly three-dozen Democratic lawmakers wrote to the President to protest this provision, arguing that it "invites ideological enforcement and suppresses dissent," concluding, "That is not scientific integrity—it is its undoing".[30] This change effectively politicizes the process of adjudicating scientific disputes, creating an environment where researchers may fear "professional retaliation or public vilification for producing evidence that challenges political narratives".[30]

The administration's rhetoric of "restoring trust" and promoting "gold standard science" thus appears to be a form of doublespeak. While the language is pro-science, the practical effects of the policies are profoundly anti-establishment science. The appointment of figures widely viewed by the scientific community as purveyors of misinformation, combined with a transparency rule that could exclude decades of public health research, is more likely to deepen political polarization and erode public trust than to restore it.

A New Guard: The Ideological Remaking of Federal Science Leadership

The architects and enforcers of this new agenda are a handpicked group of leaders installed at the top of the nation's most important health and science agencies. These appointments are not disparate choices but reflect a coherent strategy to place like-minded individuals, often with public profiles built on criticism of the scientific establishment, in control of the federal science apparatus. Their backgrounds, public statements, and confirmation processes reveal a clear pattern of ideological alignment.

Appointee &	Confirmation	Key Prior Positions/Affi	Notable Public	Stated Goals	Source(s)

Title	Vote	liations	Stances/Criticisms	for Agency	
Robert F. Kennedy Jr. HHS Secretary	52-48	Founder, Children's Health Defense; President, Waterkeeper Alliance	Prominent critic of vaccine safety and efficacy; opposed by Sen. McConnell for "trafficking in dangerous conspiracy theories."	"Make America Healthy Again"; tackle chronic disease; ensure "gold-standard science."	[15]
Dr. Mehmet Oz CMS Administrator	53-45	TV host, *The Dr. Oz Show*; Heart surgeon, Columbia University	Chastised by Senate in 2014 for promoting weight-loss products with no "scientific muster"; aligned with "Make America Healthy Again" agenda.	Promote healthier lifestyles; integrate AI and telehealth; rethink rural health care delivery.	[18]
Dr. Marty Makary FDA Commissioner	56-44	Surgical oncologist, Johns Hopkins; Author	Critic of COVID-19 response, including vaccine mandates and school closures; advocate for randomized, controlled trials.	Ensure FDA holds to "gold standard of trusted science, transparency, and common sense"; streamline drug	[19]

				approvals; scrutinize food additives.	
Dr. Jay Bhattacharya NIH Director	53-47	Professor of medicine & economics, Stanford University	Co-author, Great Barrington Declaration, which opposed COVID-19 lockdowns; plaintiff in *Murthy v. Missouri* censorship case.	Restore public trust in science; establish a "culture of respect" for scientific dissent; focus NIH research on the chronic disease crisis.	[22]
Table 2: Key Science & Health Leadership Appointments in the Trump Administration					

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., as head of HHS, now oversees a sprawling department that includes the NIH, CDC, and FDA. His confirmation was a major political battle, overcoming opposition rooted in his decades of anti-vaccine advocacy.[15] His supporters, like his former organization Children's Health Defense, celebrated his confirmation as a chance to advance "radical transparency" and "gold-standard science".[16]

Dr. Mehmet Oz, now leading CMS, brings a history of celebrity and controversy to a massive federal bureaucracy. His past promotion of unproven treatments on his television show was a central focus of his confirmation process, raising questions about his suitability to oversee programs that rely on evidence-based medicine.[18] He has embraced Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA) agenda, which seeks to redesign the nation's food supply and casts doubt on some established scientific research.[33]

Dr. Martin Makary, the new FDA Commissioner, is a respected surgeon and researcher from Johns Hopkins but also a vocal critic of what he views as medical establishment dogma, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.[19] He has expressed a strong belief in the primacy of randomized, controlled trials, a stance that could align with the "Gold Standard Science" EO's emphasis on reproducibility.[34] However, he takes the helm of an agency that has been subjected to staffing and resource cuts and must now navigate the administration's deregulatory agenda while maintaining scientific standards.[34]

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, the new NIH Director, is an economist and physician who gained national prominence for co-authoring the Great Barrington Declaration.[22] His stated goals for the NIH include restoring public trust by encouraging "scientific dissent" and focusing research on the chronic disease epidemic, in line with the MAHA agenda.[23] He inherits an agency facing mass layoffs, grant freezes, and a mandate to implement ideologically contentious policies, such as the cuts to indirect research cost reimbursements that threaten the financial stability of research universities across the country.[10]

The collective profile of this new leadership team is unmistakable. It is a group defined by its public opposition to the very scientific consensus and institutional authority they have been appointed to lead. Their installation represents the successful execution of the second part of the administration's pincer movement: the capture of the scientific leadership from above, ensuring that the diminished resources of their agencies will be directed according to a new set of political and ideological priorities.

Section 3: The Million Veteran Program: A "Crown Jewel" in the Crosshairs

The high-level policies, budgetary battles, and personnel changes detailed in the preceding section are not abstract political maneuvers. They have profound, tangible consequences for scientific research on the ground. To illustrate this, this report now turns to its central case study: the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Million Veteran Program (MVP). This landmark initiative, once a bipartisan point of pride, now finds itself directly in the crosshairs of the administration's broader agenda. The threats to the MVP are a microcosm of the challenges facing the entire federal scientific enterprise, demonstrating how a program can be systematically undermined not by a

direct order for its termination, but by the slow, bureaucratic degradation of its supporting ecosystem. This is a clear example of "death by a thousand cuts."

The Promise and Potential of a National Treasure

To understand what is at risk, it is essential to first appreciate the immense value and potential of the Million Veteran Program. Launched in 2011, the MVP has successfully enrolled over one million veteran volunteers, making it the largest research program within the VA and one of the largest and most diverse genetic research cohorts in the world.[3] Participants provide a blood sample for genetic analysis, grant researchers secure access to their VA electronic health records (EHRs), and complete detailed surveys on their lifestyle, health status, and military experiences.[39]

This combination of genetic data, longitudinal clinical data from the VA's comprehensive EHR system, and self-reported survey information creates an unparalleled resource for medical research. The program's scientific output has been prolific, resulting in over 400 publications in top-tier scientific journals like *Nature* and *Cell* since 2018.[4] This research has already yielded significant new findings on a wide range of conditions that disproportionately affect the veteran population, including PTSD, anxiety, traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance use disorders, and various forms of cancer.[4] For example, MVP data is being used to build new, personalized screening strategies for breast cancer in women veterans, a population whose risk factors may differ from the civilian women on whom most current screening plans are based.[41] Other projects are investigating the genetic markers for prostate cancer, the progression of multiple myeloma, and the immunogenetic factors in HPV-related head and neck cancers.[41]

The program's value extends far beyond veteran-specific conditions. Because of its scale and diversity—with 18% of participants identifying as non-Hispanic Black and 8% as Hispanic—the MVP is a vital resource for studying health disparities and ensuring that the promise of personalized medicine is available to all Americans.[43] Its ultimate goal is to use its findings to bring precision medicine to the forefront of VA health care, revolutionizing how diseases are prevented, diagnosed, and treated not just for veterans, but for all of humanity.[4]

The MVP is supported by a sophisticated and secure infrastructure. It has a centralized recruitment and enrollment platform, which now includes an online portal

to streamline participation.[45] All participant data is coded to remove personally identifiable information, and blood samples are stored separately in a central biorepository, ensuring veteran privacy is protected.[38] Access to individual-level data is strictly controlled, limited to VA-approved researchers working within a secure VA computing environment.[46] This robust and secure framework was the foundation upon which a decade of scientific discovery was built.

Systemic Threats to a Vital Research Enterprise

Despite its profound success and promise, the MVP is now facing a convergence of systemic threats that jeopardize its future. These threats are direct consequences of the administration's broader policies of fiscal austerity, administrative disruption, and ideological realignment.

The Supercomputing Crisis: The most acute and immediate threat to the MVP is the potential loss of its essential data analysis capability. The sheer volume of genomic and clinical data generated by the program—involving over a million participants and millions of genetic variants—requires immense computational power that the VA does not possess in-house.[48] To solve this, the VA established a critical partnership in 2016 with the Department of Energy (DOE), known as the MVP-CHAMPION (Computational Health Analytics for Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes Now) initiative.[49] This collaboration gives VA researchers access to the DOE's world-class supercomputers, such as the Summit and Andes systems at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which are necessary to perform the complex analyses that underpin the program's discoveries.[44]

This vital partnership is now in peril. In late April 2025, the VA Secretary disclosed that the interagency agreements authorizing the use of these supercomputers remained unsigned, with some set to expire as soon as September.[2] This administrative failure has left the entire program in "limbo".[2] Researchers and former officials have expressed grave concern, with one researcher stating that the agreement "should be extended for the next 10 years" and that computing is "a key ingredient" to major health research advances.[2] Without access to these supercomputers, the massive dataset that veterans have altruistically donated—a resource built over more than a decade at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars—is at risk of becoming inert and wasted. The uncertainty has already caused "incremental" damage, with some MVP-related grants lapsing as the future of the program's analytical capabilities

remains in doubt.[2]

The Infrastructure and Human Capital Crisis: The crisis in computing power is compounded by a broader assault on the VA's research infrastructure and personnel. The VA's research enterprise has been buffeted by the same hiring freezes, layoffs, and contract cancellations affecting other federal agencies.[2] Documents reveal that the VA has cancelled at least 37 research-related contracts, including for services absolutely essential to the MVP's function, such as

genomic sequencing and **biostatistics support**.[2] The department has also cancelled contracts for four cancer registries for veterans, creating potential gaps in the very data that MVP researchers rely on to conduct their work.[2]

The human cost of these actions is equally severe. A hiring freeze instituted by the new VA leadership prevented the routine renewal of contracts for term-limited scientists and support staff.[2] This has resulted in a "brain drain" as experienced personnel, some with decades of institutional knowledge, have been forced to depart the agency.[2] Internal VA emails, obtained by ProPublica, reveal the devastating impact on the ground. Doctors at VA hospitals warned that these cuts were having "severe and immediate impacts," leading to the stalling of "life-saving cancer trials" for conditions like metastatic head and neck cancer because the research staff needed to run them were no longer employed.[13] One senior researcher, speaking anonymously for fear of retaliation, stated, "We're already losing people. We're going to be losing things that can't restart".[13]

The Ideological Threat: A more subtle but no less significant threat comes from the administration's government-wide ideological agenda. The President's executive order terminating all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs was swiftly implemented at the VA, which announced in January 2025 that it had ended its DEI initiatives and was reallocating millions of dollars in associated salaries and contracts.[31] While framed as a move to end "divisive" spending and refocus on the VA's core mission, this policy poses a direct threat to the scientific integrity of the MVP. One of the program's greatest strengths is the diversity of its cohort, which allows researchers to study health disparities and genetic risk factors across different racial and ethnic groups—a key goal of health equity research.[4] A political climate that is hostile to DEI and has been shown to target research grants that mention "race" or "gender" could chill, defund, or delegitimize studies that seek to leverage one of the MVP's most valuable scientific assets.[10]

The cumulative effect of these actions has been a collapse in morale and an erosion

of trust. Researchers within the VA describe a "cone of silence" and a fear of reprisal from the administration.[2] The chaos of "ever-shifting series of cuts, hiring freezes and other edicts from the White House" has left doctors and scientists scrambling.[13] This internal turmoil risks damaging the most crucial element of the program: the trust of the veteran participants who are its foundation.

Threat to MVP	Causal Administrative Action/Policy	Documented Impact	Source(s)
Loss of Data Analysis Capability	Failure to renew interagency agreements for the VA-DOE MVP-CHAMPION partnership.	Critical agreements for supercomputer access are unsigned and set to expire, placing the program in "limbo" and risking the waste of all collected data.	2
Degradation of Research Infrastructure	Cancellation of at least 37 research-related contracts at the VA.	Loss of essential support services, including genomic sequencing, biostatistics, and cancer registries that provide crucial data for MVP studies.	2
Loss of Human Capital / "Brain Drain"	Agency-wide hiring freeze and failure to renew contracts for term-limited employees.	Experienced scientists and support staff have departed; "life-saving cancer trials" have been stalled or stopped due to loss of key personnel.	2
Chilling of Health Disparities Research	Government-wide termination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.	Creates a hostile political climate for research on race, gender, and health equity, potentially undermining studies that leverage the	10

		MVP's diverse cohort.	
Erosion of Morale and Trust	Chaotic implementation of cuts, freezes, and edicts; fear of reprisal.	A "cone of silence" among researchers; potential to undermine the trust of the one million veteran participants who are the program's foundation.	[2]
Table 3: Documented Impacts of Administrative Actions on the VA's Million Veteran Program			

The situation facing the MVP starkly illustrates a fundamental contradiction in the administration's political priorities. The administration consistently uses pro-veteran rhetoric, promising to "love our veterans" and ensure they are well cared for.[13] The Million Veteran Program is arguably one of the most significant and impactful long-term investments in veteran health ever undertaken. Yet, the administration's broader anti-science and anti-bureaucracy agenda is directly imperiling this "crown jewel." This conflict reveals that, when forced to choose, the ideological goal of dismantling the federal scientific and administrative state is taking precedence over the political goal of supporting veterans. The potentially catastrophic damage to the MVP appears to be considered acceptable collateral damage in a much larger ideological war.

The consequences of this neglect, should it lead to the failure of the MVP, would reverberate far beyond the VA. As a globally significant genomic database, the MVP contributes to international research collaborations, such as the COVID-19 Host Genetics Initiative.[52] Its findings are intended to "improve the health of all humanity".[44] Allowing this unique and powerful resource to be squandered would not only be a profound betrayal of the one million veterans who volunteered their data for the greater good, but it would also represent a significant blow to America's scientific leadership and a tragic loss for the future of medical research worldwide.

Section 4: Synthesis and Forward Outlook: The Enduring Consequences for American Science

The evidence examined throughout this report—from the administration's sweeping budget proposals and regulatory reinterpretations to its strategic personnel appointments and the specific, tangible impacts on the Million Veteran Program—paints a coherent and deeply concerning picture of the state of American science. This concluding section synthesizes these findings to offer a holistic assessment of the administration's agenda and a forward-looking analysis of its potential long-term consequences.

Revisiting the "War on Science" Thesis

Returning to the provocative thesis of Heather Digby Parton's article, the analysis conducted in this report suggests that the "war on science" metaphor, while incendiary, is an apt description of the administration's actions.[1] The evidence does not point to a simple disagreement over budgetary priorities or a conventional effort to streamline government. Instead, it reveals a strategic, multi-front, and ideologically driven campaign to fundamentally reshape the federal scientific enterprise. The administration's approach goes far beyond policy debate; it constitutes a foundational challenge to the principles of independent, evidence-based inquiry that have guided American scientific progress for generations.

The strategy is comprehensive, employing a "pincer movement" that attacks the scientific establishment from two directions simultaneously. From below, it seeks to starve agencies of resources through drastic budget cuts and the weaponization of bureaucratic processes to block congressionally appropriated funds.[9] From above, it imposes ideological control by installing a new guard of leadership hostile to the scientific consensus and by implementing new "scientific integrity" policies that are enforced by political appointees and designed to sideline disfavored research.[15] This two-pronged assault is designed not merely to shrink the scientific enterprise, but to capture and redirect it toward politically and ideologically aligned ends.

The Long-Term Damage Assessment

The potential enduring consequences of this agenda are profound and multifaceted, threatening to inflict damage that could take years, if not decades, to repair.

Erosion of Institutional Capacity: The most immediate and tangible damage is the erosion of institutional capacity. The proposed budget cuts, even in their moderated congressional forms, will shutter research programs and halt scientific inquiry across the country. More insidiously, the "brain drain" of scientific talent—driven by hiring freezes, contract cancellations, and the creation of a hostile work environment—represents a loss of institutional knowledge that is difficult to quantify but impossible to quickly replace.[2] World-leading institutions like NASA and the VA's research arm are losing experienced personnel whose expertise is critical to long-term, complex projects.[13] This degradation of human capital will inevitably undermine American scientific competitiveness on the global stage.

Loss of Public Trust: A more lasting and perhaps more dangerous consequence is the potential for a permanent erosion of public trust in science. The administration's strategy involves the deliberate elevation of figures who have built public profiles on questioning scientific consensus, particularly in the realm of public health.[15] By placing these individuals at the helm of agencies like HHS and the NIH, the administration lends the weight of the federal government to what was once considered fringe commentary. This, combined with the active politicization of scientific agencies and the labeling of established science as biased or corrupt, risks creating a deep and lasting public skepticism toward scientific institutions. This erosion of trust will make it exponentially more difficult to manage future public health crises, from pandemics to the long-term impacts of climate change, as a significant portion of the population may be primed to distrust the guidance of public health officials.

The Chilling Effect on Innovation: The targeted cancellation of grants in politically sensitive areas—such as climate science, health equity, and vaccine research—sends a powerful message to the scientific community.[10] It creates a chilling effect that will discourage a generation of researchers from pursuing novel, high-risk, or politically contentious lines of inquiry. When scientists fear that their funding can be revoked for ideological reasons, or that their findings will be publicly vilified if they challenge a political narrative, the natural impulse is to retreat to safer, more incremental work. This self-censorship stifles the very creativity, curiosity, and intellectual risk-taking

that are the engines of breakthrough innovation.

The Future of the Million Veteran Program

The fate of the Million Veteran Program serves as the ultimate cautionary tale. This report has detailed how a program of immense scientific value and national importance is being systematically jeopardized by administrative neglect and ideological collateral damage. Its future hangs in the balance, contingent on seemingly mundane bureaucratic decisions that carry monumental consequences. The most immediate and critical inflection point is the status of the VA-DOE supercomputing agreement.[2] The failure to renew this partnership would effectively render the MVP's vast data repository unusable, squandering a massive public and private investment and betraying the trust of the more than one million veterans who volunteered to advance the cause of science. The program's peril is a stark demonstration of how a broader political agenda can inflict profound and potentially irreversible harm on even the most celebrated national research initiatives.

Concluding Statement

The evidence compiled in this report leads to an unavoidable conclusion: the second Trump administration is pursuing a coherent and strategic agenda that poses a fundamental threat to the integrity, capacity, and independence of the American scientific enterprise. The case of the Million Veteran Program illuminates this threat in stark relief, showing how a "crown jewel" of medical research can be brought to the brink of failure not by a public decree, but by the quiet, cumulative impact of budget cuts, contract cancellations, and bureaucratic inertia. The consequences of this agenda, if fully realized, will not be confined to the laboratories and research universities of today. They will echo for decades, manifesting in diminished innovation, eroded public trust, and a reduced capacity to meet the complex health, environmental, and security challenges of the future. The battle being waged is not merely over line items in a budget; it is over the very role of evidence, expertise, and empirical truth in American governance and public life.

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