

# United States Senate

February 3, 2023

Dr. Lisa Graumlich  
President  
American Geophysical Union  
2000 Florida Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20009

Dear President Graumlich,

Members of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) are some of the world's preeminent climate scientists, and have a keen understanding of the crisis facing our planet if we fail to act on climate change. Yet, according to reports, at AGU's 2022 Fall Meeting in Chicago, after climate scientists Dr. Rose Abramoff and Dr. Peter Kalmus engaged in a brief, civil protest urging their fellow scientists to participate in climate activism, AGU expelled them from the conference, threatened them with arrest if they returned, and complained directly to their employers, apparently precipitating Dr. Abramoff's firing.<sup>1</sup> I fear that this gross overreaction to a peaceful protest will have a chilling effect on scientifically informed activism by climate scientists and urge AGU not to respond so unnecessarily and disproportionately to future climate-inspired civil disobedience.

Drs. Abramoff and Kalmus, both of whom have a long record of presentations and peer-reviewed publications on climate science, have repeatedly sought to communicate to the public and their fellow scientists the urgent need for climate action. On December 15, 2022, they walked on stage during a pause in the AGU Fall Meeting and unfurled a banner reading: "Out of the lab and into the streets," before calling on scientists to take urgent action against climate change.<sup>2</sup> Their banner was snatched from them and AGU staff quickly escorted them off stage as audience members applauded and cheered; the non-violent disruption lasted less than a minute. According to Dr. Abramoff, she and Dr. Kalmus then had their research withdrawn from the conference program, were expelled from the conference, threatened with arrest if they returned, and were the subjects of complaints that AGU sent to their employers.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the new year, Dr. Abramoff was fired from her position at Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

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<sup>1</sup> Rose Abramoff, *I'm a Scientist Who Spoke Up About Climate Change. My Employer Fired Me.*, N.Y. Times (Jan. 10, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/10/opinion/scientist-fired-climate-change-activism.html>; Morgan McFall-Johnsen, *2 climate activists got kicked out of the world's biggest Earth-science conference for protesting, and one says the association is 'silencing scientists'*, Insider (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.businessinsider.com/climate-researchers-ejected-from-agu-fall-meeting-banner-activism-interview-2022-12>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kalmus (@ClimateHuman), Twitter (Dec. 15, 2022, 11:11 PM), <https://twitter.com/ClimateHuman/status/1603603621001805825?s=20&t=d1eTLOW6wiz9SDydN29bmA>.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan McFall-Johnsen, *2 climate activists got kicked out of the world's biggest Earth-science conference for protesting, and one says the association is 'silencing scientists'*, Insider (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.businessinsider.com/climate-researchers-ejected-from-agu-fall-meeting-banner-activism-interview-2022-12>.

Discordantly, at the same time AGU was quelling Drs. Abramoff and Kalmus's climate activism, it was providing a platform for a former world leader promoting political activity by climate scientists. During the Presidential Keynote Lecture at the same AGU Fall Meeting, Carlos Alvarado Quesada, the 48<sup>th</sup> President of Costa Rica, spoke of the "ethical and moral responsibility" of climate scientists to place science at the "center of political action," and how "doing the right thing gets very unpopular."<sup>4</sup> Sadly, AGU's response to Drs. Abramoff and Kalmus appears to have validated former President Quesada's prescient warning.

Through AGU's annual Fall Meeting, it has done vital work to promote and share climate science.<sup>5</sup> AGU also supports policymakers who seek solutions to climate change. And AGU even awards a monetary prize to scientists who engage in climate communication.<sup>6</sup> It is as baffling as it is disappointing that AGU apparently paired its important efforts to promote global understanding of climate change with efforts to suppress actions taken in furtherance of it. This sentiment is shared by more than 2,000 scientists who have signed an open letter to AGU concerning the Fall Meeting protest.<sup>7</sup>

Protest may not be convenient or popular. It may disrupt and get in the way. But such disruption is nothing compared to the planet-wide disruptions that climate change is already wreaking. This upheaval will only worsen if we do not enact the "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" that the science demands to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.<sup>8</sup>

To help me better understand what transpired at AGU's Fall Meeting, and the consequences, please respond to the following questions in writing by February 20, 2023:

1. After Drs. Abramoff and Kalmus's demonstration at AGU's 2022 Fall Meeting, did AGU or anyone acting on its behalf threaten either of them with arrest? If so, please explain why.

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<sup>4</sup> AGU 2022 Fall Meeting, Presidential Keynote Lecture by former President Carlos Alvarado Quesada (Dec. 12, 2022), <https://www.agu.org/Fall-Meeting/Pages/Schedule-Events/Keynotes-Plenaries>.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Parker *et al.*, *Arctic Cyclones in the Era of Rapid Climate Change*, AGU 2022 Fall Meeting (2022), <https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm22/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/1092888>; Gage *et al.*, *Climate Change-Induced Retreat Drives Water Contamination from Tropical Glaciers*, AGU 2022 Fall Meeting (2022), <https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm22/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/1070325>; Li and Long, *Climate Change Threatens Terrestrial Water Storage over the Tibetan Plateau*, AGU 2022 Fall Meeting (2022), <https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm22/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/1071322>; Morgan McFall-Johnsen, *Rain could soon overtake snow in parts of the Arctic, top scientists warn*, Insider (Dec. 15 2022), <https://www.businessinsider.com/arctic-regions-changing-to-rainfall-instead-of-snow-2022-12>.

<sup>6</sup> AGU Climate Communications Prize, <https://www.agu.org/Honor-and-Recognize/Honors/Union-Prizes/Climate-Communications-Prize> (last visited Jan. 30, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Open Letter to the American Geophysical Union, <https://www.aguopenletter.com/> (last visited Jan 30, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments* (2018), <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>.

2. Did AGU complain either to Dr. Abramoff's or Dr. Kalmus's employer about their actions at the Fall Meeting? If so, how did AGU communicate the complaint(s)? If any complaint was in writing, please provide a copy.
3. Did AGU withdraw the research presented by Dr. Abramoff and Dr. Kalmus? If so, please explain why; identify the policies that were followed in making this decision; explain how this decision is consistent with AGU's Scientific Integrity and Professional Ethics standards;<sup>9</sup> and provide a copy of the research abstracts that were withdrawn.
4. Does AGU believe that firing is an appropriate response to a brief, non-violent protest related to and informed by scientific topics under discussion at the Fall Meeting? If not, does AGU believe that neither Dr. Abramoff nor Dr. Kalmus should lose their jobs because of their actions at the Fall Meeting?
5. AGU acknowledged funding from Chevron as recently as 2020, and previously voted to continue receiving money from Exxon.<sup>10</sup> Does AGU currently accept sponsorship or any other form of funding from fossil fuel companies for the annual Fall Meeting or any other activities? If not, when did AGU stop taking such funding? If yes, what safeguards are in place to ensure that AGU is not influenced by such funding in how it responds to climate protest?
6. How does AGU intend to respond to peaceful climate activism in the future?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter. Please contact my office at 202-224-2742 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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<sup>9</sup> AGU *Scientific Integrity and Professional Ethics*, American Geophysical Union (Aug. 2017), [https://www.agu.org/-/media/Files/Learn-About-AGU/AGU\\_Scientific\\_Integrity\\_and\\_Professional\\_Ethics\\_Policy\\_document.pdf](https://www.agu.org/-/media/Files/Learn-About-AGU/AGU_Scientific_Integrity_and_Professional_Ethics_Policy_document.pdf) at p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Zahra Hirji, *American Geophysical Union Again Agrees to Continue Accepting Exxon Money*, Inside Climate News (Sept. 25, 2016), <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/25092016/american-geophysical-union-agu-exxon-funding-climate-change-denial-investigation/>; AGU Fall Meeting 2020 (Sponsorship by Chevron is acknowledged under “#AGU20 Sponsors & Partners”), <https://www.agu.org/Fall-Meeting-2020> (last visited Jan. 30, 2023).