

Who Should Be President Trump's Science Czar?



By Alex Berezow — November 22, 2016



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The position of Science Czar is just one of thousands that President-Elect Trump must consider in the coming weeks. The incumbent, John Holdren, was a flawed choice. His fringe views on demographics and environmental policy, expressed in a [book](#) [2] he co-authored with Paul Ehrlich (who notoriously wrote the now discredited *The Population Bomb*), should have disqualified him from the post.

President Trump can do much better. The optimal candidate is a polymath, somebody who can quickly explain to the President anything from biotechnology to space policy. Additionally, he or she must be good at communicating; neither Mr. Trump nor his advisors are trained in science, and it will fall upon the Science Czar to be a trusted guide on complex issues. Finally, previous experience in government is helpful, though probably not necessary.

Given those criteria, here are my five suggestions:

Richard Muller. One of the most pressing issues facing America is energy policy. A competent advisor who can explain the complex physics of energy would be an invaluable asset. (For instance, it is important for a president to understand that it is physics, not the fossil fuel lobby, that explains why solar panels are not yet powering the planet.) There is perhaps no better communicator and thinker on this topic than Prof Richard Muller, a physicist at the University of California-Berkeley, who has written the book [Energy for Future Presidents](#) [3]. Additionally, he has a commanding grasp of space technology and nuclear weapons, and he founded the influential [Berkeley Earth](#) [4] project which independently assessed the data on climate change. Dr Muller would be among my ideal choices for Science Czar.

Nina Fedoroff. As a [former president](#) [5] of the American Association for the Advancement of

Science and a [former member](#) [6] of the [National Science Board](#) [7] (which determines policy for the National Science Foundation and provides the President and Congress with science policy advice), [Prof Nina Fedoroff](#) [8] has spent much of her career as a high-profile science policy analyst and communicator. Her personal expertise is in plant and molecular biology, which would allow her to provide additional insights into the contentious field of genetic engineering.

Regina Dugan or Arati Prabhakar. One of President-Elect Trump's campaign promises was to increase military spending. Because of its interest in cutting-edge weapons technology, the military provides a major boost to basic R&D. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has funded all sorts of futuristic research, from [laser cannons](#) [9] to [special suits](#) [10] that would allow soldiers to scale walls like geckos. Both the former head of DARPA, [Dr Regina Dugan](#) [11] (now at Facebook), and the current head of DARPA, [Dr Arati Prabhakar](#) [12], would make excellent Science Czars.

Henry Miller. As the founding director of the FDA's Office of Biotechnology, Dr. Henry Miller is perhaps America's most well-versed policy expert in genetic engineering. Regulations surrounding the use of GMOs are complicated (and will only become more so with the advent of techniques such as CRISPR). As a former insider, Dr. Miller has many ideas on how to reform the bureaucracy in order to facilitate biotech innovation.

There are many other qualified candidates for this position. Any properly credentialed person with a broad knowledge of science who is driven by data rather than ideology is certainly worth consideration. Do you have more suggestions? Let us know in the comments section below.

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