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HOLDREN CONFIRMED AS DIRECTOR OF OSTP

Pledges openness, high ethical standards, and respect for scientific integrity

The Senate voted unanimously last night to confirm John P. Holdren as director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the Executive Office of the President. Holdren also serves as Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Co-Chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST).

Prior to this appointment Holdren was the Teresa and John Heinz Professor of Environmental Policy and Director of the Program on Science, Technology, and Public Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He served concurrently as Professor of Environmental Science and Policy in Harvard's Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences and as Director of the independent, nonprofit Woods Hole Research Center.

With advanced degrees in aerospace engineering and theoretical plasma physics from MIT and Stanford, Dr. Holdren is highly regarded nationally and internationally for his work on energy technology and policy, global climate change, and nuclear arms control and nonproliferation. A member of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as a former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he brings to the new post exceptional connections across the scientific and engineering communities.

President Obama has called Holdren "one of the most passionate and persistent voices of our time" addressing the growing threat of climate change and the value of science and technology as a means of strengthening the nation. "I look forward to his wise counsel in the years ahead," Obama said in announcing Holdren's nomination in December. "Today, more than ever before" the President added, "science holds the key to our survival as a planet and our security and prosperity as a nation."

In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Transportation, and Science on February 12, Holdren noted that much of the growth of the U.S. economy over the past half-century has been directly attributable to scientific and technological advances. It is this generation's responsibility, he said, to make sure those gains are maintained and extended. "In today's time of economic crisis, we must resist the temptation to reduce our investments in these foundations of our prosperity," Holdren told Senators.

Following his confirmation, Holdren said he was gratified that the stimulus bill passed by Congress recognized the importance of ongoing investments in innovation by including crucially needed funding for an array of science and engineering efforts with large potential payoffs for society – biotechnology, nanotechnology, information technology, renewable energy, and more efficient cars and buildings, among others. Also important, he noted, is that a portion of the recovery package is designated explicitly for high risk/high-reward research — “the kind that, when successful, proves truly transformative.”

The importance of integrity in the conduct of science and in the melding of science with public policy will be another theme in Holdren’s work in the White House, he said. “The relevant facts from science and engineering are never the only inputs to policy decisions,” he said, “but they are often essential.” In his confirmation hearing on February 12, he pledged to work “to ensure the science and technology advice our policy-makers need is always the best it can be.”

Holdren worked early in his career as an aerospace engineer at the Lockheed Missiles and Space Company, as a theoretical physicist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and as a Senior Research Fellow in the Environmental Quality Laboratory and the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences at Caltech. In 1973 he co-founded, and then co-directed until 1996, a pioneering interdisciplinary graduate program at the University of California, Berkeley - the Energy and Resources Group - focused on the interaction of scientific, technological, economic, and sociopolitical dimensions of energy and environmental challenges.

He has served since the early 1970s on a wide variety of advisory panels to government on science and technology matters, including the Committee on International Security and Arms Control of the National Academy of Sciences, which he chaired from 1994 to 2004.

Through both terms of the Clinton administration, he served as a member of PCAST, working closely with OSTP and chairing studies requested by President Clinton and Vice President Gore on preventing theft of nuclear materials, the prospects for fusion energy, a comprehensive R&D strategy for the energy challenges of the 21st century, and international cooperation on energy-technology innovation.

Dr. Holdren has been active in international cooperation on issues of energy, environment, and nuclear arms control and nonproliferation for nearly four decades. He has built and led collaborative projects on these topics with partners in Russia, China, India, Brazil, Japan, Austria, Italy, and Germany, among others. From 1987 to 1997 he served as chair of the Executive Committee of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and in that capacity gave the acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Pugwash Conferences in 1995.

Among other awards, he has been honored with the John Heinz Prize in Public Policy, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, and the Volvo Environment Prize. Holdren was also a recipient, in 1981, of one of the first MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowships. He subsequently served, from 1991 to 2005, as a member of the MacArthur Foundation’s board of trustees.

OSTP was created by Congress in 1976 to serve as a source of scientific and technological analysis and judgment for the President with respect to major policies, plans, and programs of the federal government. Specifically, OSTP is authorized to:

- Advise the President and others within the Executive Office of the President on the impacts of science and technology on domestic and international affairs
- Lead interagency efforts to develop and implement sound science and technology policies and budgets
- Work with the private sector to ensure that federal investments in science and technology contribute to economic prosperity, environmental quality, and national security
- Build strong partnerships among the federal government; state and local governments; other countries; and the scientific community
- Evaluate the scale, quality, and effectiveness of the federal effort in science and technology.

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