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UCLA Daily Bruin July 15, 2013

UCLA professor resigns from air quality panel

July 15, 2013

BY AMANDA SCHALLERT

UCLA professor John Froines recently announced plans to resign from a panel of scientists charged with evaluating possible threats to air quality in California after serving on it almost 30 years.

Froines, a professor in the UCLA Department of Environmental Health Sciences, said in a statement released last week that he plans to step down midway through his term as chair of the California Scientific Review Panel on Toxic Air Contaminants on Aug. 1. He has chaired the panel since 1998.

Froines's resignation comes after multiple controversies surrounding his position on the panel.

While he served on the panel, the state legislature did not follow formal appointment protocol. Additionally, there have been claims that Froines conducted independent research with the panel while maintaining ties to other scientists who disapproved of the chemicals he was evaluating, creating a conflict of interest.

The panel consists of nine scientists selected from a pool of California researchers by the state's legislature and the California Environmental Protection Agency secretary, according to the panel's website.

As part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, the panel evaluates possible air contaminants and advises three different California departments on the risks of those chemicals and their effects on air quality and human health.

In his resignation letter sent Monday, Froines wrote that his reasons for leaving the council were "straightforward."

"I want to spend time with my family and travel, but most importantly to continue my chemical/biologic toxicology research at the UCLA School of Public Health," he wrote.

Froines declined to comment on his resignation beyond the statement.

During the time Froines served on the panel, he and other members were not appointed and reappointed to the panel using formal protocol.

Froines and four other members of the panel were replaced in 2010 after a lawsuit was filed against the state for not following proper appointment procedures, according to Daily Bruin archives.

State law calls for the legislature and the California Environmental Protection Agency to appoint or reappoint panel members every three years from a candidate pool.

The legislature and the California EPA did not follow formal appointment protocol, however, resulting in the 2010 lawsuit.

Froines returned to the panel after just a few months, in November, though another chair had been appointed to lead the panel by that time.

Last February, the assembly re-appointed Froines for another three-year term —which would last until January 2015.

In the months before Froines resigned, the Bakersfield Californian published multiple columns that publicized UCLA's refusal to disclose all of Froines's personal responsive emails, despite requests from a company that produced a chemical the Scientific Review Panel had evaluated.

In 2009, Froines and the panel were tasked with evaluating the chemical methyl iodide, which was manufactured by Arysta LifeScience a corporation that makes insecticides and fungicide products.

After conducting research, the Scientific Review Panel issued a report documenting the harmful effects of methyl iodide. Arysta LifeScience then requested the UC disclose public records in July 2010, including Froines's emails.

UCLA took about 10 months to disclose the records and never agreed to send the entirety of the request, despite protests from the Arysta LifeScience lawyer, according to two year's worth of email communications between the lawyer and Kevin Reed, the UCLA Vice Chancellor of Legal Affairs.

Some of the public records showed that the CEO of the Pesticide Research Institute emailed Froines a report conducted by a federal body, assessing the chemical methyl iodide.

Froines was sent the report even though he and the panel were tasked to conduct their own independent evaluation of methyl iodide in 2009.

One email contained a message from Froine's assistant — Elinor Fanning — in 2009 saying Froines would support UC Berkeley Professor Robert Bergman, who sent the United States Environmental Protection Agency a letter calling methyl iodide "highly toxic."

"John talked with Bergman last week, and we want Bergman to know that we would support him in any way possible going to the governor, etc. but that we have to remain behind the scenes at the moment," Fanning wrote. "John has to protect his position as chair of the review committee for the time being."

Steve Ritea, the associate director of university communications, said he disagreed with allegations that Froines had any conflict of interest while conducting research.

“(Froines’s) work resulted in important government regulations, often opposed by industry, that today protect countless citizens and have undoubtedly saved many lives,” Ritea said in the statement. “It is unfortunate that those politically opposed to government oversight of industry have chosen to level baseless allegations against Professor Froines.”

The legislative assembly will choose a new chair for the Scientific Review Panel from a pool of applicants to serve out the remainder of Froines’s term.

Compiled by Amanda Schallert, Bruin senior staff.

Email Schallert at aschallert@media.ucla.edu.

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Amanda Schallert** <aschallert@media.ucla.edu>

Date: Thu, Jul 11, 2013 at 10:45 AM

Subject: Re: FW: daily bruin — John Froines

To: "Ritea, Steve" <sritea@support.ucla.edu>

Hi Steve,

Thank you for the statement.

Best,
Amanda

On Thu, Jul 11, 2013 at 9:42 AM, Ritea, Steve <sritea@support.ucla.edu> wrote:

Hi Amanda-

Here is a statement on the matter. Please attribute it to me:

Professor Froines is a renowned scientist long recognized as an expert in his field who recently chose to retire from active service at UCLA. His work for the university and the state helped increase understanding of the impacts of chemicals and airborne particulates on environmental quality and human health. That work resulted in important government regulations, often opposed by industry, that today protect countless citizens and have undoubtedly saved many lives. It is unfortunate that those politically opposed to government oversight of industry have chosen to level baseless allegations against Professor Froines. UCLA is grateful for the sound science he produced over the course of a long career dedicated to quality and integrity.

Any questions related to Professor Froines' service with the Scientific Review Panel are best directed to the California Air Resources Board, which formed the panel.

Steve Ritea

Associate Director

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From: Amanda Schallert [<mailto:aschallert@media.ucla.edu>]

Sent: Wednesday, July 10, 2013 1:23 PM

To: Stanton, Chris

Subject: daily bruin — John Froines

Hi Chris,

This is Amanda from the Daily Bruin. I was wondering if I could talk with a UCLA administrator about the Scientific Review Panel and John Froines. I read that he resigned Monday from his position on the panel but wanted to confirm that this was true. Since he has served on the panel so long, I was wondering if the university had a comment on why he resigned after being reappointed as chair and who was going to take his position. Froines declined to comment on his resignation to me earlier today.

Additionally, I was wondering if I could talk with an administrator about claims that Froines was affiliated with anti-pesticide groups while he served on the panel.

Thanks for your time,

Amanda Schallert

[415-994-6536](tel:415-994-6536)