

## **EDITORIAL: TAKING ACTION AGAINST HISTORICAL CENSORSHIP BY USRA**

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This statement is my opinion and does not reflect an official position of the Planetary Science Institute.

Institutions are reeling from the spray of executive orders from the White House since late January. Activities in support of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) have been particular targets, with the cancellation of large numbers of research and other grants and contracts and the bizarre purging of material from government websites (including, for a time, information about the airplane that dropped the first atomic bomb, the Enola Gay). Many of these organizations have, in the absence of specific direction from the government, overreacted with wholesale anticipatory obedience, using the worst behavior of government actors as their guidance. Websites and signage have been (and continue to be) purged of material guessed to be offensive to the government. The history of government funded activities are being rewritten as a consequence. For the planetary science community, the censorship of our history by the Universities Space Research Association (USRA) is particularly impactful and demands community action.

USRA manages meetings of the NASA Assessment Groups and Analysis Groups and maintains the records of these meetings and their findings on websites run by the USRA Lunar and Planetary Institute (USRA/LPI). USRA/LPI has also managed one of the largest meetings of the planetary community, the Lunar and Planetary Science Conference (LPSC) for fifty years, publishing the programs and abstracts of work presented at these meetings initially in paper volumes, but now on websites.

On January 21, 2025, Executive Order 14173 was released. For every government contract or award, the recipient must “certify that it does not operate any programs promoting DEI that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws” and failure could trigger action under the federal False Claims Act. On January 31, NASA notified AG chairs to pause their work pending review of their compliance with new executive orders. On February 2, USRA/LPI began taking down AG websites. AG chairs report that they were given no advanced notice that these sites were being taken down, contrary to the USRA/LPI narrative (<https://tinyurl.com/yfjzbhz2>). Within a couple of weeks, it was noticed that scans of these sites were being blocked on the “Wayback Machine” – scans of the entire internet done by archive.org, whose terms of service allow for authors and publishers to have their material blocked or removed. This would seem to indicate further unreported action by USRA/LPI. It is truly a rewriting of history.

After the LPSC conference in mid-March, AG sites began to slowly return with content removed. Some AG chairs, when requesting lists of the redacted material, were told no full list

will be furnished. An examination of the Wayback Machine today indicates that access to historical scans of some of these sites have not been restored or that scans of some areas (like documents) continue to be blocked.

As AG sites began returning, USRA/LPI began quietly removing DEIA material (and per reports some non-DEIA material as well) from LPSC meeting sites without the permission of the authors whose material was being removed (see <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-01438-9>). On May 8, USRA released a statement acknowledging what they were doing (<https://tinyurl.com/32y9btve>), saying they were acting on the advice of counsel (I can attest that not all counsel would give the same advice). This statement failed to disclose the actual scope of what they had been doing or the fact that it is ongoing (on May 27, a scientist reported that USRA/LPI removed an abstract that had been published from the LPSC in 1991!). Some LPSC meeting sites or portions of them appear to be blocked today on the Wayback Machine.

I do not know if a separate instance was created of the entire USRA/LPI meeting and other archives that were then edited and made public. If not, I am concerned there is a risk of the permanent loss of information.

On June 16, 2025, Judge William G. Young of the Federal District Court for the District of Massachusetts ordered the government to restore much of the funding from hundreds of National Institute of Health grants that were cancelled because of their being perceived to be supportive of DEI. “This represents racial discrimination and discrimination against America’s L.G.B.T.Q. community,” he said. When organizations like Universities and private organizations, like USRA, make their own uninformed determinations of what comprises DEI material that would be offensive to the government and then scrubs it from their websites and other offerings, they may themselves be engaged in discrimination in violation of federal statutes.

It is my personal opinion that USRA/LPI has no integrity, it is misrepresenting the history of our community, and it is a threat to the long-term stability and continuity of many decades of community scientific records. They can restore that integrity by reversing their actions (if possible).

As a community, I think there are three things we should do. First, I recommend we support the petition to boycott LPSC unless and until this reversal occurs (go to <https://forms.gle/G1yAxZqmDujbVDHR7>). The second is that a consortium of our professional organizations and societies begin planning a meeting to replace the LPSC. I would suggest this meeting be held in Washington, DC, so our legislators can be more exposed to the importance of what we do as a profession and the contributions we make to our society. Third, we must determine a means by which our meeting records, almost all stored by USRA/LPI, can be archived at other publicly accessible locations.