

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

[April 19, 2021]



Our weekly bulletin collects and digests news of the past week.

Contributions welcome.

[Click here](#) to view this weekly news bulletin on a web page. Previous weeks' bulletins are archived [here](#).

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

Nature: [NIH reverses Trump-era restrictions on fetal-tissue research](#)

The United States is reversing restrictions on fetal-tissue research set by former president Donald Trump's administration. Government scientists will be able to resume studies using the biological material, and an extra ethics review of grant proposals submitted by academic researchers has been cancelled.

NPR: [Here's what you should know about Biden's new rules for fetal tissue research](#)

Fetal tissue is used in research into HIV, Parkinson's, and other diseases such as COVID-19, but is a tactic that is opposed by many anti-abortion groups. The Trump Administration had banned NIH funding for research involving fetal tissue obtained from abortions and required funding applications for research using fetal tissues to go through an Ethics Advisory Board composed of public opponents to abortion rights. These restrictions were reversed by Biden's Health and Human Services Secretary.

Science: [New York state ends stem cell research funding](#)

A new budget for 2022 halts funding for new grants involving stem cell research, but honors existing contracts. New York had one of the US's only state-level programs dedicated to stem cell research, but a representative from the state's Division of the Budget said that the research should "advance within academic and private research communities rather than the Department of Health, which is focused on its core mission of delivering direct services and achieving positive health outcomes for all New Yorkers."

NPR: [Scientists create early embryos that are part human, part monkey](#)

Macaque monkey embryos were injected with 25 human stem cells for research into organ production for people who need transplants. The scientists studied how the animal and human cells interacted, with hopes of learning how to grow organs for transplantation in other animals. They also state the research could aid in our understanding of early human development. Critics worry that if allowed to develop, these embryos could produce a chimeric human-animal brain and potentially human-animal gametes. In the face of ethical concerns, the researchers say they have no intention of using such a closely related species to grow organs for transplantation.

New York Times: [Vaccines won't protect millions of patients with weakened immune systems](#)

Some immunocompromised individuals are unable to produce antibodies in response to the vaccine, leaving those most susceptible to the virus still at risk even after vaccination. Monoclonal antibodies from people who have recovered from COVID-19 are being tested as a preventative measure, in addition to a treatment, for those unable to produce antibodies of their own. Health experts recommend immunocompromised individuals still receive vaccines as they may produce some protective immune cells, and even antibodies in some cases.

NPR: [Johnson & Johnson halt isn't just a U.S. problem](#)

The J&J vaccine is planned to be distributed to over 1 billion individuals across the globe, with Brazil, Canada, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, and the African Union, among others, set to receive shipments later this year. Health authorities in South Africa and many European countries put distribution on hold after reports of a small number of women developing blood clots after vaccination. It is predicted that the US will resume use of the J&J vaccine soon, after a review by the FDA and CDC.

Guardian: [Advances mean all new US vehicles can be electric by 2035, study finds](#)

A study at the University of California, Berkeley found that the price of electric cars is projected to match their gasoline-powered counterparts in 5 years due to improvement in battery efficiency and cost. Researchers predict these innovations could lead to the sale of new gasoline and diesel vehicles being phased out within 15 years. Since electric cars require less costly maintenance and are more efficient, electric transport would save consumers \$2.7 trillion by 2050. Emissions from transportation are currently the largest greenhouse gas source in the US.

American Institute of Physics: [Senators pump brakes on Endless Frontier Act](#)

The bipartisan bill was originally introduced last year and proposed an allocation of \$100 billion to a new technology directorate within the NSF over 5 years. Committee members hesitant of the bill suggest it should incorporate other agencies besides just the NSF and worry its direction gives the government "too large a role in promoting specific technologies." Republican lawmakers want to include more emphasis in the bill on preventing Chinese interference in US research.

Washington Post: [Lawmaker seeks White House explanation for ouster of scientist who led climate review](#)

Rep. Frank D. Lucas (Okla.), ranking Republican of the House Science Committee, has contacted the White House to express concern and request information on its decision

to remove Betsy Weatherhead from her role leading the federal government's definitive report on climate change.

REGIONAL NEWS

*Indiana Daily Student: [HB 1577 places reproductive healthcare in Indiana under threat](#)
HB 1577, currently awaiting Gov. Eric Holcomb's signature, constitutes the latest in Indiana's long history of attempts to limit Hoosiers' rights to reproductive healthcare. The bill, already passed by the Indiana House and Senate, would subject patients to dangerous misinformation and limit access to medication-induced abortions.*

IndyStar: ["Like a hostage negotiation": Indiana bill on renewable energy standards dies after pushback](#)

Energy groups, consumer advocates, environmentalists and the business community all supported the legislation, saying it would bring significant investment to the state and help with Indiana's energy transition. But local officials and groups opposed the bill raising concerns over home rule.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

National Geographic: [This fish stuck in a disposable glove is a warning about the risks of COVID-19 litter](#)

Reports of robins, seagulls, penguins, and even hedgehogs trapped in face mask ear loops, which can impair their movement and make them vulnerable to predation, indicate that what is helping us through the pandemic is harming others. In dealing with the health crisis of today, we are creating an environmental crisis for tomorrow. Shifting from single-use to reusable masks could make a big difference in the amount of PPE litter found.

AP: [As extreme weather increases, climate misinformation adapts](#)

With about 7 in 10 Americans saying they believe climate change is happening, misinformation has now shifted from denialism to focus on its real-world impacts. In some ways, that's a positive, as it demonstrates increased public understanding of the problem. But it also creates new opportunities for those who would spread bogus claims.

Grist: [Leaked calls show ALEC's secret plan to fight Biden on climate](#)

The American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, has formed the new Functional Federalism Working Group to redress what they see as an imbalance of power between Biden's presidency and state governments, a majority of which are dominated by conservatives.

The Intercept: [Chemical Industry lobbyist in Trump era suppressed evidence of cancer risk](#)

Trump administration officials withheld information about carcinogenic pollution from Illinois communities, according to a report released yesterday by the Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general. Bill Wehrum, who served as assistant administrator of the office of Air and Radiation until 2019, kept information

from residents of Willowbrook, Illinois, about results of air monitoring that showed they had an elevated risk of cancer due to ethylene oxide from a local sterilizing plant.

Inside Climate News: [Noxious neighbors: The EPA knows tanks holding heavy fuels emit harmful chemicals. Why are Americans still at risk?](#)

In an 18-month investigation, Inside Climate News found that emissions from heated tanks containing asphalt and No. 6 fuel oil pose a risk to the health of millions of Americans who live close to the tanks, one that federal and state regulators have failed to adequately address.

Science: [A water rule that turns a blind eye to transboundary pollution](#)

With the Biden administration having signaled its intent to modernize regulatory review and to review specific deregulatory actions taken by the Trump administration, it is time to recognize that the environmental federalism approach downplays the importance of cross-state pollution and relies on flawed methods of benefit-cost analysis that could be used to weaken other statutes.

The Conversation: [Interstate water wars are heating up along with the climate](#)

In some cases, more water rights exist on paper than as wet water— even before factoring in shortages caused by climate change and other stresses. States should put at least as much effort into reducing water use as they do into litigation, because there are no guaranteed winners in water lawsuits.

Tampa Bay Times: [Failure at Piney Point: Florida let environmental risk fester despite warnings](#)

As early as 2008, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was predicting possible disaster at the old Piney Point phosphate plant in Manatee County if a plan to use the site for dredging went forward. Now more than 200 million gallons of wastewater have been pumped into Tampa Bay, the environmental impact of which is still unknown.

Reuters: [Michael Oppenheimer: The Pioneer](#)

For all his triumphs, Michael Oppenheimer and scientific seers like him have faced one resounding defeat: The world's political and policy leaders, supported by a large segment of the public in key fossil-fuel producers such as the United States and Australia, have been slow to act on their life's work, with some leaders staunchly resisting their findings of human-driven climate change.

Morning AgClips: [Agricultural trade could mitigate economic impacts of climate change](#)

A new study from the University of Illinois looks at how changes in weather—including extreme events—may decrease crop profit in one state while increasing profits in other states. The secret ingredient: U.S. interstate trade. It is expected to mitigate the economic impact of climate change by up to \$14.5 billion by the middle of the century.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

South Bend Tribune: [Let Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb know you value Indiana's wetlands](#)

We hope Gov. Holcomb understands wetlands provide far more value for all Hoosiers than the alleged cost-savings developers will realize from reduced regulation. He needs to hear from you, too.

The CSIU Weekly News Bulletin is now available on the web. To view this page online go to <https://csiub.org/weekly-news-bulletins>. To view archives of past bulletins, see <https://csiub.org/bulletin-archives>.

Our CSIU news bulletin is intended to provide a brief update on recent news, editorials, as well as action items related to science integrity and science policy. Note that editorial pieces and action items are assembled from a variety of sources and organizations; they do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy priorities of Concerned Scientists @ IU. This week's news bulletin was compiled by ASIU and IU biology major Emma Hand and CSIU member Christoph Irmischer of IU's Department of English. We're looking for volunteers! If you'd like to volunteer—or if you have additional links you'd like to share for future bulletins, send them to Christoph at cirmsche@indiana.edu.

To join our listserv, send an email to csiu-l-subscribe@list.indiana.edu. To unsubscribe from this list, send an email to csiu-l-unsubscribe@indiana.edu. You can leave the subject line and message blank.