

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

[April 26, 2021]



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

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NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

New York Times: [Biden's climate summits sets up a bigger test of American power](#)

President Biden's summit meeting on climate change ended on Friday with the United States promising to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and help other countries do the same. But the real test will be Washington's ability to steer the rest of the world toward cleaner energy fast enough to avert catastrophe. The limits of America's influence were clear. Australia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and Russia made no new pledges to cut down on oil, gas, or coal.

The Hill: [UN to declare slashing methane emissions more important than previously thought](#)

The global methane assessment, a report put together by an international group of scientists, is expected to express the growing determination that the globe must begin to quickly decrease planet-warming gas emissions, including methane, the principal component in natural gas, to help matters in the short term.

Nature: [India's massive COVID surge puzzles scientists](#)

Researchers in India are trying to pinpoint what is behind the unprecedented surge, which could be due to an unfortunate confluence of factors, including the emergence of particularly infectious variants, a rise in unrestricted social interactions, and low vaccine coverage. Untangling the causes could be helpful to governments trying to suppress or prevent similar surges around the world.

Science: [NIH lifts restrictions on fetal tissue research](#)

Researchers who rely on fetal tissue from elective abortions to study human development and disease may now be able to resume work recently stalled by restrictive federal policies. President Joe Biden's administration last week lifted a ban

on such studies by researchers within the National Institutes of Health and eliminated a review board that had torpedoed funding applications from external researchers.

Science: [Biden fills out science team with NOAA, DOE, and diplomacy picks](#)

President Joe Biden is rounding out his science team. The White House yesterday announced nominees to lead the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Office of Science, and the Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Science Affairs. The trio includes two veterans of government service and one newcomer.

New York Times: [Biden picks a NOAA chief, looking to end the agency's long stretch without a leader](#)

President Biden announced he would nominate Rick Spinrad, a professor of oceanography at Oregon State University, to head the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the country's premier climate science agency. This marks a new chapter for NOAA, which was at times a source of tension for former President Donald J. Trump, who publicly sparred with the agency's scientists and was unable to get any of his nominees to lead it confirmed by the Senate. NOAA has been without a Senate-confirmed leader for the longest period since it was created in 1970.

Morning Ag Clips: [Launching the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate](#)

At President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate on April 23, 2021, the United States and United Arab Emirates, with endorsement from the United Kingdom's COP 26 Presidency, and with support from Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Israel, Singapore, and Uruguay, announced plans to launch the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM for Climate), which will increase and accelerate global innovation research and development (R&D) on agriculture and food systems in support of climate action.

DW: [Germany: The Green Party's economic plans](#)

Opinion polls show Germany's Green Party has taken a seven-point lead over Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives, which if sustained, could see the Greens seize power from the center-right CDU/CSU alliance. The surge in popularity has caused many to question whether a party that has traditionally championed a single cause—the environment—can be pragmatic enough to rebuild Germany's economic base.

REGIONAL NEWS

The Indiana Lawyer: [Holcomb asked to veto wetlands bill by environmental activists, Hoosiers](#)

More than 100 activists and residents from across the state are pleading with Gov. Eric Holcomb to veto a bill that would remove a large chunk of protections from Indiana's wetlands, which were the target of a bill that opponents say could damage water supply, wildlife, and vegetation. Passing out of the Indiana Legislature on April 14, the controversial wetlands bill has sparked bipartisan opposition within the Republican-dominated General Assembly.

USA Today: [State lawmakers opposed to COVID vaccine mandates have filed a flurry of bills this session. Some worry about the message they send](#)

As the federal government works to make COVID-19 vaccines available to all Americans, lawmakers in more than 40 states have introduced legislation that would

forbid mandates requiring people get vaccinated. “The thought of a state mandating that people take a vaccine that is still experimental according to the manufacturers of the vaccine would be considered a gross violation of the individual freedom of Hoosiers,” said Rep. John Jacob, R-Indianapolis.

South Bend Tribune: [Indiana lawmakers reach deal on bill limiting local health department emergency powers](#)

Indiana legislative negotiators have reached an agreement on limiting the authority of county or city health departments by allowing local elected officials to overturn orders or enforcement actions issued during emergencies. Public health officials across the state have urged Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb to veto the bill, cautioning that putting public health orders in the hands of elected officials would introduce politics into decisions that should be focused on science, and could delay the response to emergencies.

Indiana Environmental Reporter: [Indiana youth move mountains](#)

On March 19, 2021, students from across Indiana gathered at the Indiana Statehouse for a climate strike, part of a global call for strikes to raise awareness of the climate crisis and demand action. The strike was organized by the Indiana youth group Confront the Climate Crisis. Students gave speeches and recited chants, but they also delivered a letter to Governor Eric Holcomb, declaring a climate emergency for the state of Indiana and requesting a meeting to express their concerns to him. Governor Holcomb’s office did not respond to emails and calls inviting him to comment on the students’ initiative.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

The Intercept: [The fight to clean up the EPA](#)

Trump nearly broke the EPA. Can the Biden administration repair the damage? As the cleanup process gets underway, many within the agency’s ranks are desperately hoping it will strengthen protections to the point that EPA can withstand industry pressures not just during the Biden administration but under any administration that comes into the White House.

The Guardian: [How US chemical industry lobbying and cash defeated regulation in Trump era](#)

PFAS, also called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of 4,500 fluorinated compounds that for decades have been used to make thousands of products water and stain resistant. The seven largest PFAS producers and their industry trade groups tallied at least \$61m in federal political spending during 2019 and 2020, the bulk of which was directed at lobbying Congress and the Trump administration instead of campaign donations.

Nature: [How a historic funding boom might transform the US National Science Foundation](#)

US officials are discussing whether the National Science Foundation (NSF) — which funds about 25% of all basic academic research in the country — should get a historic budget boost, potentially changing the US science landscape. During congressional hearings last week, legislators evaluated proposals that would increase the agency’s funding by as much as US\$100 billion over about five years. Any of these, if passed,

would represent one of the largest increases for the NSF since it launched nearly 70 years ago.

Scientific American: [Science policy can't be simply about science](#)

Even under administrations with greater appreciation for scientific integrity and evidence-based policymaking, the scientific community must continue working to ensure that our evolving scientific enterprise is committed to racial, economic, and social equity.

UCS: [For effective science advocacy, focus on shared values, and speak up often](#)

Science provides an excellent return on investment. Science funding pays dividends in new technologies, new cures, improved STEM education pipelines, and a stronger economy. These paybacks are not always tangible, so they are difficult to quantify, but they result from investments in basic science as well as more applied scientific discoveries.

Environmental Health News: [Paris climate agreement overlooks wood pellet loophole](#)

Many of the biggest wood pellet companies that sell to Europe are in the Southeast U.S. Because wood pellets are subsidized by many European countries as a renewable energy source, the U.S.'s backing out of the Paris Agreement had the potential to overturn the whole "sustainable wood pellet" slogan. With the U.S. back in, the new rules are a non-issue; Europe can continue burning biomass without counting the emissions.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

Earthjustice: [What's killing all the wildlife?](#)

We are all connected through the web of life, reliant on plants and animals for our own survival. All creatures have a right to exist and flourish on this planet, and nature is a source for many of comfort, inspiration, and spiritual and emotional salvation. However, nature as we know it is in peril. To learn more and take action, read the Q&A with Drew Caputo, vice president of litigation for lands, oceans, and wildlife at Earthjustice.

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