

# Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

## [May 2, 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 summit sets up a bigger test of American power](#)*

*Biden pledged to halve US greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. This is slightly below the goal set by the European Union but still considered very ambitious. China plans to reach its peak emissions in 2030 and then achieve net zero emissions by 2060, saying it started industrializing much later than Western countries. China is currently the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, while the US has released the most overall throughout history. China also stated that "if the United States no longer interferes in China's internal affairs, then we can have even smoother cooperation that can bring more benefits to both countries and the rest of the world," referring to the US response to China's actions regarding Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Xinjian Province.*

*New York Times: [Senate reinstates Obama-era controls on climate-warming methane](#)*

*Congressional Democrats used the Congressional Review Act to repeal a methane rule enacted by the Trump Administration and re-instate Obama-era rules on methane pollution. The regulations require companies to monitor and limit the amount of methane leaking out of oil and gas wells. Congressional Republicans used the Congressional Review Act to roll back many Obama-era regulations, and this is the first time it is being used by Congressional Democrats.*

*The Guardian: [Streams and lakes have rights, a US county decided. Now they're suing Florida](#)*

*An Orange County law passed in November protects waterways, specifically their rights to exist and be protected against pollution. Citizens of Orange County have filed a lawsuit on behalf of a network of streams, lakes, and marshes that would be destroyed by a planned housing development. Though laws protecting the "rights of nature" exist and have been upheld in courts across the world, this is the first time one is being tested and potentially enforced in the US.*

Smithsonian: [Communities of color “disproportionately and systematically” face deadly air pollution, regardless of location or income](#)

*Researchers looked at 14 different sources of PM 2.5 (particulate matter that can enter the lungs and bloodstream and cause many health issues) and found that Hispanic, Black, and Asian Americans are exposed to higher levels regardless of geographic or economic factors, with specifically Black Americans exposed to high levels from all 14 source types. Sources include industry, agriculture, construction, and power plants. Particulate air pollution causes 85,000 to 250,000 US deaths each year.*

American Institute of Physics: [Congress revisits case for a federal climate service](#)

*The House Science Committee had a hearing to discuss the possible creation of a federal climate service which would focus on coordinating climate data and projections, as well as disseminating climate-related risk information. Democrats said it would help consolidate currently fragmented climate research and information from different agencies such as NOAA, USGS, and the Department of Agriculture, while Republicans warned of governmental redundancy and instead offered the private sector and academic institutions as means of collecting and disseminating climate information.*

Science: [Biden’s nominee for science chief issues apology, defends character at confirmation hearing](#)

*Eric Lander, a molecular biologist and previous head of the Broad Institute, was nominated as the head of the Office of Science and Technology but faced some questions from both Republicans and Democrats concerning his past, specifically regarding his role in downplaying the contributions of two female scientists in developing CRISPR and the two lunch meetings he had with Jeffrey Epstein. The remainder of the hearing focused on his views concerning federal spending on science and research initiatives, such as the proposed Advanced Research Projects Agency-Health within the NIH, which would focus on creating technologies needed for cancer and other disease research and treatment.*

Science: [New Google effort uses cellphones to detect earthquakes](#)

*Google released an earthquake warning system built into their smartphones in New Zealand and Greece, two countries with frequent earthquakes and without operational warning systems. Instead of relying on seismometers to detect an earthquake, then having to relay the information via smartphones or other messaging tactics, Google has earthquake sensing built into the phones or available via a system update that can directly sense and disseminate the information. Over 100 phones are needed to detect the earthquake before Google sends out an alarm to all phones in the at-risk region, but the system has detected over 1,000 earthquakes so far.*

Reuters: [Scientists say India government ignored warnings amid coronavirus surge](#)

*A forum of scientific advisers set up by the government warned Indian officials in early March of a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus taking hold in the country, five scientists who are part of the forum told Reuters. Despite the warning, four of the scientists said the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus. Millions of largely unmasked people attended religious festivals and political rallies that were held by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and opposition politicians.*

*Morning AgClips:* [Appeals court tells EPA to ban pesticide or decide it's safe](#)

*A federal appeals court on Thursday ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to quickly determine whether a pesticide linked to brain damage in children should be banned, saying the agency had delayed acting on the widely used bug-killer chlorpyrifos for nearly 14 years. In a 2-1 decision, the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the EPA to act on a possible ban within 60 days.*

## **REGIONAL NEWS**

*News and Tribune:* [Holcomb sharply criticized for signing wetlands repeal bill](#)

*Gov. Eric Holcomb drew sharp criticism Friday after signing legislation to remove state protections from Indiana's wetlands, a measure opposed by businesses and environmental groups as well as a fifth-grader from Carmel. Senate Enrolled Act 389 repeals the requirement of a permit for development or other impacts on wetlands and creates a task force to study wetlands. Over 100 organizations opposed SEA 389, including the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.*

*The Herald Republican:* [Environmental groups vow to continue fight to preserve Indiana's wetlands](#)

*The groups plan to work with a task force the law creates to help mitigate what they believe is a disastrous policy. "We are disappointed in (Holcomb's) decision to support this bad legislation that eliminates regulation protecting most of the state's remaining isolated wetlands," said Larry Clemens, the Nature Conservancy's state director. "These wetlands are important, and without these regulations, even more will be destroyed."*

*WFYI:* [Cash-strapped state environmental agencies face more budget cuts](#)

*The funding for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for the 2022 and 2023 fiscal years will be about 3 percent lower than the current budget. Even though the Indiana Department of Environmental Management received more money from the state's general fund, it will be operating with about 11 percent fewer dollars overall.*

*Indy Star:* [U.S. Senate confirms Hoosier Janet McCabe to be Deputy Administrator in Biden's EPA](#)

*In a time of partisan politics, McCabe was confirmed in a 52-42 vote. Republican Sens. Susan Collins (Maine), Chuck Grassley (Iowa), and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) joined most Democrats to vote for her nomination. Sen. Joe Manchin (W.Va.) was the only Democrat to vote against. McCabe, an environmental law and policy expert at Indiana University's McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis, previously worked at the EPA under former President Barack Obama with a focus on air quality.*

## **OPINION AND ANALYSIS**

*The Hill:* [Biden's first 100 days: Where he stands on science](#)

*According to the Silencing Science Tracker of the Sabine Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia University, Biden's actions on behalf of science's role in federal policy so far remedy just 1 percent of the Trump-era efforts to restrict or prohibit scientific research and discussion between the November 2016 election and January 2021. At this*

rate, it would take the Biden administration roughly 10,000 days or 27 years to fully undo the Trump administration's actions.

*Boston Review:* [Science doesn't work that way](#)

*As the world continues to struggle through waves of disease, many seek a world more inclined to listen to scientific experts. But getting there does not require returning to the high-deference attitude the public may have once held toward experts. Turning back the clock may well be both impossible and undesirable. In a way, a low-deference stance toward experts and authorities is just what a well-functioning democracy aims at.*

*NPR:* [Why having diverse government scientists is key to dealing with climate change](#)

*Many of the Biden administration's policy goals depend on a robust, stable, and diverse scientific workforce. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions rapidly and equitably, as the federal government has promised, will require sweeping new policies that apply current understandings of pollution and atmospheric science. But past efforts to reduce pollution have disproportionately benefited people who live in whiter, richer parts of the country.*

*New York Times:* [Biden has elevated the job of science adviser. Is that what science needs?](#)

*The job's stature has declined as science has become more specialized and the advisory work has focused increasingly on narrow topics unlikely to draw presidential interest. Some critics argue that so many specialists now inform the federal government that a chief White House scientist has become superfluous.*

*UCS:* [Federal government should embrace more diverse and inclusive science advice](#)

*The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) led a group of 16 scientific, professional, and academic organizations, including the American Public Health Association (APHA), the American Geophysical Union (AGU), Ciencia Puerto Rico, 500 Women Scientists, and the American Association of University Professors, that sent a letter to 24 federal science agencies and departments in support of diversifying the science advisory committees that support policy decisions across the government.*

*Scientific American:* [Few would fear COVID vaccines if policy makers explained their risks better](#)

*Health officials have a duty to explain, with specific numbers, whether fewer people will likely be harmed with a pause than without it—an estimate they can reasonably make, even though it will vary from place to place. They should also explain how confident they are in their information. According to some public health experts, initial explanations for the vaccine pauses were “a colossal communications failure.”*

## **TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS**

*NRDC:* [Tell the EPA to protect our health by removing toxic lead pipes from our water systems!](#)

*The Lead and Copper Rule, a federal protection meant to keep lead out of drinking water, is woefully outdated. Biden's American Jobs Plan includes significant investments to our water infrastructure, and the EPA is seeking comments from the public now on how to strengthen the rule. NRDC is rallying to generate 100,000 letters to the EPA before the June 30 comment deadline urging the Biden administration to*

*strengthen the Lead and Copper Rule and immediately remove every single lead pipe out of the ground.*

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*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 CSIU member Christoph Irmscher of IU's Department of English and by ASIU member Emma Hand, a junior 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](mailto:cirmsche@indiana.edu).*

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