

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [November 23, 2020]



NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

Grist.org: [Biden's latest appointment, John Kerry, signals how the new administration will handle the climate crisis](#)

Kerry will get a seat on the National Security Council, the chief body responsible for planning foreign policy and military matters. It's the first time anyone on the council will be focused solely on the climate, and the latest sign that President-elect Joe Biden intends to use the tools of foreign policy—and not just executive actions at home—to combat global warming.

Politico: [Biden to spotlight CDC officials shunned by Trump](#)

President-elect Joe Biden is putting scientists in charge and back on the stage to restore trust in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The plans include immediately reviving regular media briefings and giving a central role to long-sidelined career officials including Nancy Messonnier, the public health official who first warned of the "severe" impact of the Covid-19 back in February.

New York Times: [F.D.A. grants emergency authorization of antibody treatment given to Trump](#)

Regeneron's cocktail of two sets of antibodies has been approved for use for treating coronavirus-infected patients over 12 years old who are likely to develop a severe case of the disease. They hope to produce enough for 80,000 people by the end of November and enough for 300,000 people by the end of January.

New York Times: [Bill Gates and the quest to vaccinate the world](#)

The billionaire is working with the W.H.O., drugmakers and nonprofits to defeat the coronavirus everywhere, including in the world's poorest nations.

Investigate Midwest: [Trump EPA removes tool states use to protect farmworkers, environment](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency announced it would no longer allow state pesticide regulators to use special local needs (SLN) labels under Section 24(c) of the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, the nation's top law regulating pesticides, to restrict how pesticides are sprayed. For decades, states have used these labels to restrict how pesticides are sprayed in order to meet local conditions, including to limit spraying of pesticides to certain times of year or weather conditions or adding training requirements.

New York Times: [Trump using last days to lock in policies and make Biden's task more difficult](#)

At a wide range of departments and agencies, Mr. Trump's political appointees are going to extraordinary lengths to try to prevent Mr. Biden from rolling back the president's legacy. They are filling vacancies on scientific panels, pushing to complete rules that weaken environmental standards, and trying to eliminate health care regulations that have been in place for years.

Scientific American: [New scientist-candidates for U.S. Congress fared worse than expected in 2020](#)

New science-oriented candidates for U.S. Congress had a large number of losses. Despite national events, many voters apparently were not swayed by the pro-science campaigns of these newcomers. Among Senate challengers, former astronaut Mark Kelly won in Arizona, and former geologist John Hickenlooper succeeded in Colorado, where he was previously the state's governor.

American Institute of Physics: [Election 2020: Implications for science policy in Congress](#)

With a diminished House majority and a runoff election deciding who controls the Senate, it is unlikely Democrats will have the support needed to pass dramatic environmental regulations aimed at mitigating climate change. However, members across the aisle have shown interest in increasing research and development spending towards clean energy. Lawmakers are rushing to pass numerous outstanding bills before the replacement and shuffling of several science committee heads next year, including the National Defense Authorization Act, an energy policy bill, and a NASA policy bill.

Guardian: [Senior Biden adviser set for key role has ties to oil and gas, climate activists warn](#)

Cedric Richmond is a representative from Louisiana set to become the director of the White House Office of Public Engagement and a direct adviser to the president-elect. He has been a strong supporter of progressive causes such as police reform and racial justice but has been criticized for his lack of environmental action in a district increasingly at risk from climate change. He has received donations from oil, gas, and chemical industries and, with 7 of the 10 most air-polluted census tracts in America located within his congressional district, is seen by some as turning a blind eye to pollution.

Reuters: [GM hits reverse on Trump effort to bar California emissions rules](#)

The about-face came as GM sought to work with President-elect Joe Biden, who has made boosting electric vehicles (EVs) a top priority. The Detroit automaker has laid out an ambitious strategy to boost EV sales and last week said it will increase spending on EVs and autonomous vehicles by 35% from previously disclosed plans.

Washington Post: [U.S. greenhouse gas emissions set to drop to lowest level in three decades](#)

As a result, the United States has been inadvertently pushed back on track to meet the commitments the Obama administration made at the Paris climate agreement in December 2015, despite the fact the Trump administration pulled the country out of the pact.

Scientific American: [Methane hits record high in atmosphere as fossil fuel companies diverge](#)

The plan from the Climate & Clean Air Coalition's Oil and Gas Methane Partnership (OGMP) tasks companies with reporting methane emissions from both their core operations as well as joint ventures. As a part of the voluntary framework, companies will share their own methane reduction targets with OGMP, an initiative managed by the U.N. Environment Programme. U.S. companies are not participating.

Science: [In blistering letter, Democrats demand answers on controversial appointee to U.S. standards agency](#)

Jason Richwine was recently appointed to be deputy undersecretary of commerce for the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The House's science and research subcommittees have spoken out against his appointment, drawing attention to his background and beliefs involving "anachronistic IQ-based ranking of races in order to support his anti-immigration beliefs, leaning on debunked pseudoscience that has been used for centuries to justify colonialism, slavery, and segregation."

USA Today: [American Medical Association, the nation's largest group of doctors, deems racism a "public health threat"](#)

The new policy recognizes racism as a social determinant of health and highlights the health disparities and lack of access to health care that have significantly hindered good health in Black and other historically marginalized communities in the U.S.

New York Times: [Time runs out for a US-Canada oil pipeline](#)

Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer is shutting down a pipeline that transfers oil underwater through the Great Lakes, connecting Superior, Wisconsin and Sarnia, Ontario. The pipeline has been in operation since the 1950s, but the current operator failed to meet terms established to protect the lake.

Guardian: [UK to support plans for new global treaty to "turn tide" on plastic pollution](#)

Britain has thrown its weight behind a new global agreement to tackle the plastic pollution crisis, which Lord Goldsmith said would go "far beyond" existing international agreements. There is growing support for such a treaty internationally, but neither the UK nor the US, the world's biggest per capita producers of plastic waste, have yet pledged their support.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [Why the simple message to help stop the pandemic still isn't getting through](#)

Indiana is among eight states with the greatest number of current hospitalizations per 100,000 people. At the same time, more people in Indiana are going to work, the store and visiting friends than people in the country as a whole, and more people are visiting bars than elsewhere. People may be more inclined to follow recommendations that come at the county level because they will view the threat as more immediate.

Indiana Daily Student: [IU's great big Covid-19 experiment](#)

Even as the nation faces its worst wave of the pandemic, with Indiana averaging more than 6,500 cases a day, Indiana University's Medical Response Team believes they have a working plan to combat the pandemic.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

New Yorker: [How close is humanity to the edge?](#)

Toby Ord, a philosopher who studies our species's "existential risk," has been both frightened and encouraged by our response to the pandemic.

Yale 360: [Learning how to talk: What climate activists must do in the Biden era](#)

If activists want real progress on climate in a Biden administration, environmentalist Bill McKibben writes, they need to learn how to press their case aggressively without alienating those they must work with to get things done.

Scientific American: [To understand how science denial works, look to history](#)

Nancy Oreskes on how the same tactics used to cast doubt on the dangers of smoking and climate change are now being used to downplay COVID.

Los Angeles Times: [Biden can make historic strides on climate after four years of Trump vandalism](#)

President-elect Joe Biden has signaled a shift in federal climate change and environmental policy that will reestablish science as the guiding force in the government's approach after four years in which science was disdained by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Interior, Energy and Transportation departments.

Nature: [The ethical questions that haunt facial-recognition research](#)

Journals from several prominent publishers including Springer Nature, Elsevier, and Wiley have received criticism for publishing controversial face-recognition studies that trained algorithms to identify Uyghurs and people belonging to other Chinese minority groups. Ethicists argue that in addition to condemning controversial uses of developed technology, scientists must acknowledge ethical issues that arise when collecting data and conducting research.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTION

NRDC: [It's #TimeToAct on climate!](#)

Climate change was a top priority for voters this election—and climate voters made the difference in electing Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. We've suffered through extreme weather with record-breaking temperatures, dangerous wildfires, and deadly hurricanes this year alone, upending communities across the country. Rollback after rollback by the Trump administration have only made matters worse. This election has given us a critically important window to advance meaningful federal action on climate change and build the future we deserve. From President-elect Joe Biden, to Congress, to local leaders, it is #TimeToAct on climate change. Join millions of people across the country in demanding climate action.

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