

# Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [October 19, 2020]



## NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

*New York Times:* [By calling climate change “controversial,” Barrett created controversy](#)

*The nominee to take the place of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an environmental stalwart, used language that alarmed some environmentalists and suggested rough going for initiatives to fight climate change, if as expected she wins confirmation and cements a 6-3 conservative majority on the court.*

*New York Times:* [A viral theory cited by health officials draws fire from scientists](#)

*A manifesto urging reliance on “herd immunity” without lockdowns was warmly received by administration officials, including Scott Atlas, a neuroradiologist elevated to the role of Trump’s pandemic advisor. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious disease expert, has dismissed the declaration as unscientific, dangerous and “total nonsense.”*

*New York Times:* [The Trump administration is reversing nearly 100 environmental rules. Here’s the full list](#)

*A New York Times analysis, based on research from Harvard Law School, Columbia Law School, and other sources, counts more than 70 environmental rules and regulations officially reversed, revoked, or otherwise rolled back under Mr. Trump. Another 26 rollbacks are still in progress.*

*The Hill:* [Shuffle of EPA’s science advisers elevates those with industry ties](#)

*A shuffle to the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) independent board of science advisers will add Kenneth Mundt, a longtime consultant who has worked for the tobacco and chemicals industries, while promoting Indiana University professor John Graham, a member listed as someone “not to pick” by the Union of Concerned Scientists, to be the panel’s chair.*

*American Institute of Physics:* [FY21 budget outlook: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)

*The House proposed to increase NOAA’s budget by 2% for the upcoming fiscal year, despite the Trump Administration’s recommendation of cutting it by 14%. The proposed expansion will focus on weather and climate research. The Senate has yet to release their own proposal but will likely recommend at least level funding for the administration.*

*American Institute of Physics:* [House stakes out Energy R&D Priorities With Major Policy Bill](#)

*The House recently passed the Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act. It would be the most comprehensive update to US Energy Policy since 2007 and focuses on renewable, nuclear, and carbon capture technologies. It was passed mostly along party lines, aside from seven Republicans in support of the bill and eighteen Democrats against it.*

*The Guardian:* [Alaska's new climate threat: Tsunamis linked to melting permafrost](#)

*Researchers have found that melting permafrost is destabilizing and causing the collapse of mountains in cold northern regions and worry they could cause tsunamis if they fall into the ocean. Geologists warned that a popular tourist area in Alaska was at risk, with a major landslide possible within a year and likely to occur within the next 20 years.*

*Smithsonian:* [NOAA predicts droughts gripping nearly half of continental U.S. will intensify this winter](#)

*Drought conditions are likely to be the most widespread since 2013, with the dry conditions in the South and Southwest expected to intensify and spread further West, including to Central and Southern California. The majority of the US will also experience a warmer than average winter and NOAA reports that 2020 has a two-thirds chance of upsetting 2016 as the warmest year on record across the globe.*

*The Guardian:* [“We don't have any choice”: the young climate activists naming and shaming US politicians](#)

*The youth-led Sunrise Movement has been extremely active leading up to the election, organizing voter outreach and calls to help supporters of the Green New Deal win elections, as well as marches and Wide Awake protests targeting Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham, and other Republican senators following the police killing of Breonna Taylor and the proceedings following the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The organization has 400 hubs nationwide and focuses on climate action, as well as other progressive issues such as police and immigration reform.*

*Climate Change News:* [Brazilian spies intimidated government's own delegates at climate talks](#)

*Brazil's spy agency has been accused of trying to intimidate its own government's negotiators and Brazilian environmentalists at the Cop25 climate talks in Madrid in 2019.*

*Science:* [Department of Energy picks two advanced nuclear reactors for demonstration projects](#)

*The Department of Energy announced plans to build two new nuclear reactors within the next seven years. They plan to include new features such as replacing water coolant with sodium or helium and using a more highly enriched fuel, with the aim of making the reactors safer, simpler, and more economical.*

*Science:* [In New York, chemist Nancy Goroff is battling a Trump loyalist for a seat in Congress](#)

*Nancy Goroff is a physical organic chemist and faculty member at Stony Brook University and would be the first female PhD scientist to serve in Congress. Her opponent is an incumbent Republican seeking his fourth term in her district of Long Island. She has served on the advisory board of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and has had a politically active past.*

*Science:* [Census Bureau needs outside help to save the 2020 census from political meddling, experts say](#)

*The American Statistical Association recommended that an independent group of researchers review and process data from the US Census Bureau, citing several Trump Administration actions as preventing the agency from getting a reliable, accurate count of the US population.*

## **REGIONAL NEWS**

*IndyStar:* [Coronavirus, Obamacare, public health policies: Where the candidates for governor differ](#)

*No matter who wins on Nov. 3, whoever is governor will need to deal with a host of things beyond what stage of reopening Indiana needs to be in. He will need to lead during a pandemic that is not likely to end for at least another year. At the same time, depending on what happens at the federal level, he may have to handle changes in the Affordable Care Act that could affect low income Hoosiers' access to care.*

## **OPINION AND ANALYSIS**

*Inside Higher Ed:* [Science on the ballot](#)

*Experts see a sharp contrast between Trump and Biden when it comes to investments in federal research funding and respect for science itself.*

*Scientific American:* [Leading scientists urge voters to dump Trump](#)

*Journals and Nobelists, usually cautious, cite unprecedented damage and incompetence in calls for a U.S. leadership change.*

*Slate.com:* [Three of the most prestigious scientific journals have condemned Trump's handling of COVID-19](#)

*As conversations with the chief editors of Nature, Science, and The New England Journal of Medicine made clear, science journals have always played a role in commenting on policy, culture, and current events. If anything about these editorials is unprecedented, it's the extent to which U.S. politicians have sidelined science.*

*Science:* [Trump has shown little respect for U.S. science. So why are some parts thriving?](#)

*To analyze Trump's science policy record, Science has talked to dozens of researchers, administrators, and lobbyists. Many asked to remain anonymous because they have ongoing interactions with the administration.*

*Science:* ["Very disappointed." Trump's science adviser has left U.S. researchers wanting more](#)

*Observers say there is scant evidence that Kelvin Droegemeier, who also holds the unofficial title of the president's science adviser, has tried to mitigate any of the administration's most controversial policies relating to science and innovation, including its chaotic approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, rolling back a slew of environmental regulations, and proposing deep cuts in the budgets of most federal research agencies.*

*Grist.org:* [Amy Coney Barrett isn't a scientist, but she might be a climate denier](#)

*Barrett is considered an originalist, meaning she interprets the Constitution based on the understanding of its authors at the time of its writing. But Barrett's "not a scientist" line is anything but original.*

*Inside Climate News:* [The Sierra Club embraces environmental justice, forcing a difficult internal reckoning](#)

*Ramón Cruz, who was elected president of the Sierra Club in May, is the most visible manifestation of the public commitment to diversity and environmental justice the Sierra Club announced in July. Cruz, a 44-year-old activist living in Brooklyn, is the first Latino to hold the position in the Sierra Club's 128-year history. InsideClimate News talked to him about the Sierra Club's new priorities.*

*The New Yorker:* [How should the media talk about climate change?](#)

*Genevieve Guenther, a former Renaissance scholar, studies how we discuss global warming—and how we don't.*

*Foreign Policy:* [Welcome to the final battle for the climate](#)

*China and the EU have set the decarbonization agenda. But neither of them has America's geopolitical reach. A progressive policy push from the U.S. side would make it easier to make the case for decarbonization in India, Latin America, Canada, and Japan. A shift in stance in the United States would also reverse Trump's climate-skeptic bandwagon that conservative governments in Australia and Brazil have happily joined.*

## **TAKE ACTION**

UCS: [Join the October 22 meeting of the Vaccine and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee \(VRBPAC\)](#)

*The committee is made up of independent advisors who will help determine whether COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. On Thursday, October 22, the committee will meet to discuss the development of COVID-19 vaccines, and the FDA expects tens of thousands of people to attend virtually. Here are some answers to questions you might have in advance of Thursday's meeting.*

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