



Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [August 31, 2020]

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

The Hill: [Lawmakers call for bipartisan push to support scientific research](#)

In discussions held during The Hill's "Science & American Advancement" event, Democratic and Republican members of the House, including Rep. Trey Hollingsworth (R-Ind.), voiced support for boosting research funding and increasing the public interest in developing crucial technologies.

Guardian: [How the race for a Covid-19 vaccine is getting dirty](#)

Research facilities around the world face increasing social and political pressure to rapidly develop a Covid-19 vaccine, causing debates over which, if any, instances of cutting corners at various stages of testing or using unproven technology or methods are justified and will result in a safe, effective vaccine. Public trust in the eventual vaccine is vital to its effectiveness and likely that of future vaccines.

New York Times: [Two P.R. experts at F.D.A. have been ousted after blood plasma fiasco](#)

In an attempt to regain public trust as an apolitical decision-making body, the FDA fired two PR experts following an exaggerated statement about the effectiveness of plasma as a way to combat coronavirus. The statement received backlash from scientists, and experts worry about the FDA's decision-making position concerning coronavirus vaccines and treatments.

CBS: [Twitter removes tweet shared by Trump with false coronavirus statistics](#)

Twitter on Sunday removed a tweet shared by President Trump that contained false information about coronavirus statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with the company saying it violated its rules. The tweet was originally posted by Twitter user "Mel Q," a supporter of the unfounded QAnon conspiracy theory.

New York Times: [U.S. will revive global virus-hunting effort ended last year](#)

The Predict program searched for potential viruses transmitted by animals across the globe and was allowed to expire weeks before the start of the pandemic. The program was created in 2009 in partial response to the H5N1 bird flu scare. A new program with a similar purpose is set to start work in October.

Science: [Here's how the U.S. could release a COVID-19 vaccine before the election—and why that scares some](#)

Many public health experts worry that Emergency Use Authorizations could be used by the FDA to approve a vaccine that was rushed for political and economic purposes. The US has invested over \$10 billion to support eight different potential coronavirus vaccines. The FDA insists they will stick to stringent safety and health regulations before approving any potential vaccine.

The Atlantic: [Democrats are trying to save climate policy from the senate](#)

In a 255-page report, the Democratic Senate caucus says that it will pursue a broad approach to fighting climate change, imposing new standards and spending billions of dollars to reduce U.S. carbon pollution to net-zero by 2050. The document offers a menu of potential policies that have wide support in the party and that could be combined in future legislation.

New York Times: [Big Oil is in trouble. Its plan: flood Africa with plastic](#)

An industry group composed of large fossil fuel and chemical manufacturing companies is hoping to influence US-Kenya trade negotiations. Their aim is to reverse Kenya's strict rules on plastic bag use and agreement to stop importing plastic waste. Plastics provide another use for an oversupply of oil and gas as the world begins to shift away from fossil fuels. Exports of plastic waste to Africa quadrupled from 2018 to 2019 after China stopped accepting most plastic waste.

New York Times: [U.S. flood strategy shifts to "unavoidable" relocation of entire neighborhoods](#)

FEMA created a new program to finance large-scale relocation of communities across the country susceptible to repeated severe flooding. The plan has an initial cost of \$500 million, with anticipated costs in the billions to come. The Department of Housing and Urban Development released a similar plan that costs \$16 billion. These plans mark a shift from focusing funding on cleanup efforts and flood protection measures. Individual states have also told local governments to begin planning to relocate communities along the coast.

New York Times: [Climate is taking on a growing role for voters, research suggests](#)

Public desire for the government to do more to address climate change remained constant from 2016 to the summer of 2020, even with compounding social justice and pandemic-related concerns. The percentage of people who have taken political action on the basis of climate change almost doubled in the same time period.

AIP: [NSF seeks "systems approach" to earth science](#)

As NSF explores how to employ an Earth systems approach across its research portfolio, a new government-wide body is specifically focused on Earth systems as a key to bolstering U.S. competitiveness in weather forecasting.

Science: [Cannabis research database shows how U.S. funding focuses on harms of the drug](#)

The biggest funder, the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), doled out far more money to research cannabis misuse and its negative effects than on using cannabis and cannabis-derived chemicals as a therapeutic drug.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [Environmental groups respond to the creation of two new state forests](#)

Some environmental groups have cautiously praised the creation of two new state forests in Morgan and Brown counties because they hope it's just a first step. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb established Ravinia and Mountain Tea state forests from land that was already part of state forests. They are the first state forests to be established in 67 years.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

Politico: [What happens if China gets the Covid-19 vaccine first?](#)

U.S. prestige could falter, the administration could take deadly risks, the world will have to rethink its alliances — and those are just a few of the possibilities.

Politico: [Colleges crack down on student behavior as virus threatens more closures](#)

Many schools revised their student conduct policies to penalize hosting parties or compel mask wearing yet hoped that they could rally the community to ensure compliance without necessitating punishment. But colleges are quickly finding out the limitations of a we're-all-in-this-together mindset.

UCS: [Worried for government science? So are we](#)

Excellent government science, conducted for the public good, cannot be taken for granted. Without protections, the science we rely on—for clean water, breathable air, a livable climate, and safe homes, schools, and communities—can fall victim to political attack. While many presidential administrations have been complicit, the activities of the Trump administration have laid bare the inherent weaknesses in existing protections for science.

UCS: [A roadmap to restore science in government decisions](#)

In order to serve the public good, federal science must be strong and independent, protected by safeguards that guarantee its freedom from political interference, distortion, or censorship.

Guardian: [The US is in a water crisis far worse than most people imagine](#)

Erin Brockovich on how industrial runoff and lax standards have tainted water across the US.

Scientific American: [Medical education needs rethinking](#)

Under the lingering influence of the 110-year-old Flexner Report, medical schools still minimize social and environmental factors in the understanding and treatment of disease.

TAKE ACTION

Action Network: [Congress must block Trump from drilling in Alaska wildlife refuge](#)

In another devastating blow to environmental conservation and Indigenous peoples' rights, Trump announced he will open up the 1.6 million-acre coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas drilling. Department of Interior Secretary David Bernhardt plans to approve the proposal, attempting to lock in leases while Trump is still in office so that Democrats won't be able to roll back the move.

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 Irmscher 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.

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