Science, Technology, and Ethics
First-Year-Forum Article Bank

In Canvas, for Unit 1, you will find a list of articles organized into several sample research clusters to give you ideas for how to prepare for your own research paper later. Notice that they are loosely categorized by international, national and local stakes. There is some overlap. For example, the stakes for the local Des Moines, Iowa water pollution issue overlaps with national interests when it appears as a lawsuit in Federal court. How would it change the keyword searches if we investigated water pollution at the national level instead? As you research Science, Technology, and Ethics for your research summaries consider what subtopics you could explore in your larger controversy mapping essay. How many more subtopics can you think of beyond those listed here?

If you find one of these subtopics interesting, you can expand the research on it. However, you are not allowed to use these specific articles for your college assignments because you will need to demonstrate research skills by choosing a controversy and finding articles on your own. You are allowed to use these for discussion boards and assignments that refer to the First-Year-Forum or to the “article bank.”

You may go to Canvas and download the individual pdf files for your reference, or go directly to the website using the hyperlinks embedded into the citations. Remember that for articles from paid sources, you can also look them up for free in the UT Library databases.
I. CONTROVERSY WITH INTERNATIONAL STAKES: U.S. PARTICIPATION IN PARIS AGREEMENT (NOTICE THIS IS STILL ABOUT THE U.S.)

Sample Research Questions
- Broad starter question: How should the US interact with other nations on the issue of global climate change?
- More Focused: What should the US obligation be to participate in the Paris Accord?

Sample Articles
Editorial Board. “Our Disgraceful Exit From the Paris Accord.” *The New York Times*, 1 June 2017, ............... 4-6

Editors. “We’ll Never Have Paris.” *National Review*, 1 June 2017, The Corner sec., ......................... 7-8


Murdock, Deroy. “Let the Senate Just Say ‘Non!’ to the Paris Agreement.” *National Review*, ................. 12-16


II. CONTROVERSY WITH NATIONAL STAKES: PHARMACEUTICAL DRUG PRICING

Sample Research Questions
- Broad starter question: How should drugs be priced?
- More Focused: How should the prices of US pharmaceutical drugs be regulated?

Sample Articles


III. CONTROVERSY WITH LOCAL STAKES: WATER QUALITY IN DES MOINES, IOWA

Sample Research Questions
- Broad starter question: Who should be held responsible for water pollution?
- More Focused: Who should be held responsible for nitrate pollution in the water supply around Des Moines, Iowa? What should be done about nitrate pollution in Iowa's water supply?

Sample Articles


IV. INSPIRATION FOR MORE SUBTOPICS


V. POLITICAL CARTOONS

Our Disgraceful Exit From the Paris Accord;
Editorial

BYLINE: THE EDITORIAL BOARD

SECTION: OPINION

LENGTH: 1246 words

ABSTRACT

Here's what Mr. Trump's decision on the climate change pact says to the world: America cares little about science, its allies and competitiveness.

FULL TEXT

Only future generations will be able to calculate the full consequences of President Trump's incredibly shortsighted approach to climate change, since it is they who will suffer the rising seas and crippling droughts that scientists say are inevitable unless the world brings fossil fuel emissions to heel.

But this much is clear now: Mr. Trump's policies - the latest of which was his decision to withdraw from the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change - have dismayed America's allies, defied the wishes of much of the American business community he pretends to help, threatened America's competitiveness as well as job growth in crucial industries and squandered what was left of America's claim to leadership on an issue of global importance.

The only clear winners, and we've looked hard to find them, are hard-core climate deniers like Scott Pruitt at the Environmental Protection Agency and the presidential adviser Stephen Bannon, and various fossil fuel interests that have found in Mr. Trump another president (George W. Bush being the last) credulous enough to swallow the bogus argument that an agreement to fight climate change will destroy or at least inhibit the economy.

Mr. Trump justified his decision by saying that the Paris agreement was a bad deal for the United States, buttressing his argument with a cornucopia of dystopian, dishonest and discredited data based on numbers from industry-friendly sources. Those numbers are nonsense, as is his argument that the agreement would force the country to make enormous economic sacrifices and cause a huge redistribution of jobs and economic resources to the rest of the world.

In truth, the agreement does not require any country to do anything; after the failure of the 1997 Kyoto Accord, the United Nations, which oversees climate change negotiations, decided that it simply did not have the authority to force a legally binding agreement. Instead, negotiators in Paris aimed for, and miraculously achieved, a voluntary agreement, under which more than 190 countries offered aspirational emissions targets, pledged their best efforts to meet them and agreed to give periodic updates on how they were doing.

Paris did not, in short, legally constrain Mr. Trump from doing the dumb things he wanted to do. Which he already has. In the last few months, and without consulting a single foreign leader, he has ordered rollbacks of every one of the
Our Disgraceful Exit From the Paris Accord; Editorial The New York Times - International Edition June 1, 2017

Thursday

policies on which President Barack Obama based his ambitious pledge to reduce America's greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 - most prominently, policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gases from coal-fired power plants, automobiles and oil and gas wells.

But if withdrawing from the agreement will not make Mr. Trump's domestic policies any worse than they are, it is still a terrible decision that could have enormous consequences globally. In huge neon letters, it sends a clear message that this president knows nothing or cares little about the science underlying the stark warnings of environmental disruption. That he knows or cares little about the problems that disruption could bring, especially in poor countries. That he is unmindful that America, historically the world's biggest emitter of carbon dioxide, has a special obligation to help the rest of the world address these issues. That he is oblivious to the further damage this will cause to his already tattered relationship with the European allies. That his malfeasance might now prompt other countries that signed the accord to withdraw from the agreement, or rethink their emissions pledges.

Perhaps most astonishing of all, a chief executive who touts himself as a shrewd businessman, and who ran on a promise of jobs for the middle class and making America great again, seems blind to the damage this will do to America's own economic interests. The world's gradual transition from fossil fuels has opened up a huge global market, estimated to be $6 trillion by 2030, for renewable fuels like wind and solar, for electric cars, for advanced batteries and other technologies.

America's private sector clearly understands this opportunity, which is why, in January, 630 businesses and investors - with names like DuPont, Hewlett Packard and Pacific Gas and Electric - signed an open letter to then-President-elect Trump and Congress, calling on them to continue supporting low-carbon policies, investment in a low-carbon economy and American participation in the Paris agreement. It is also why Elon Musk, chief executive of the electric vehicle maker Tesla, was resigning from two presidential advisory councils after Mr. Trump announced the withdrawal from Paris.

Yet Mr. Trump clings to the same false narrative that congressional Republicans have been peddling for years and that Mr. Trump's minions, like Mr. Pruitt at the E.P.A. and Ryan Zinke at the Interior Department, are peddling now (Mr. Pruitt to the coal miners, Mr. Zinke to Alaskans) - that environmental regulations are job killers, that efforts to curb carbon dioxide emissions will hurt the economy, that the way forward lies in fossil fuels, in digging still more coal and punching still more holes in the ground in the search for more oil.

As alternative realities and fake facts go, that argument is something to behold. For one thing, it fails to account for the significant economic benefits of reducing greenhouse gases, avoiding damage to human health and the environment. And it ignores extensive research showing that reducing carbon emissions can in fact drive economic growth. Partly because of investments in cleaner fuels, partly because of revolutionary improvements in efficiency standards for appliances and buildings, carbon dioxide emissions in this country actually fell nearly 12 percent in the last decade, even as the overall economy kept growing. Under Mr. Obama's supposedly job-killing regulations, more than 11.3 million jobs were created, compared with two million-plus under Mr. Bush's antiregulatory regime.

It's true that the coal industry is losing jobs, largely a result of competition from cheaper natural gas, but the renewable fuels industry is going gangbusters: Employment in the solar industry, for instance, is more than 10 times what it was a decade ago, 260,000 jobs as opposed to 24,000.

Therein lies one ray of hope that the United States, whatever Mr. Trump does, will continue to do its part in controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Market forces all seem to be headed in the right direction. Technologies are improving. The business community is angry. A Gallup poll found that nearly two-thirds of Americans are worried about climate change, and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that almost 70 percent of Americans wanted to stay in the agreement, including half of Trump voters.

And some states are moving aggressively, including New York. On Wednesday, the State Senate in California, always a
leader in environmental matters, passed a bill that seeks to put California on a path to 100 percent renewable energy by midcentury. On the same day, Exxon Mobil stockholders won a crucial vote requiring the company to start accounting for the impact of climate change policies on its business.

These messages might be lost on Mr. Trump. Hopefully, not on the world.

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We’ll Never Have Paris

By The Editors — June 1, 2017

President Donald Trump has decided to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord. The United States never should have been in it in the first place, and it’s not even entirely clear that it ever was. In choosing American interests over Davos pieties — in the face of resistance from some within his own administration — the president here has made good on his promise to put America first.

The Paris Agreement is a treaty in all but name: The European signatories put it through their usual treaty-ratification protocols, but the United States did not. President Obama went to great lengths to pretend that the treaty was something other than a treaty because he did not wish to submit it for ratification by the Senate, which was almost sure to reject it — as, indeed, the Senate would likely reject it today. In a government of laws, process matters.

Substance matters, too, and here the Paris Agreement is deficient.

Even if one accepts, for the sake of argument, the alarmist interpretation of climate-change data, the Paris Agreement is unlikely to produce the desired result — and may not produce any result at all. Two countries that are responsible for a large share of greenhouse-gas emissions — China and India, the world largest and fourth-largest carbon dioxide emitters, respectively — have made only modest commitments under the agreement, which puts most of the onus on the more developed nations of North America and Western Europe. Both would continue to emit more carbon dioxide through at least 2030, and both have chosen, as their major commitment, not reductions in total emissions but reductions in “carbon intensity” — meaning emissions per unit of GDP. But these improvements are likely to happen anyway, irrespective of treaties or public policy, due to ordinary economic changes, such as the growth of the low-impact services sector relative to heavy industry, the aging-out of high-emissions vehicles, and the replacement of antiquated infrastructure.

There may be a certain humanitarian appeal in asking the richer nations to pay the higher price, but the developed world already is far more efficient in its use of energy. If you measure greenhouse-gas emissions relative to economic output, the United States already is more than
twice as green as China, and it is a middling performer on that metric: France is five times as efficient, Norway and Sweden six times. The real cost of marginal emissions reductions is necessarily going to be much higher in Switzerland than it is in Mongolia.

The Paris Agreement fails to take that economic reality into account, and it does so in ways that could end up making emissions worse rather than improving them. For example, limiting the amount of coal consumed by North American power plants would not necessarily reduce the amount of coal consumed on Earth — and climate change is, famously, a planetary issue — but would instead most likely result in shifting coal consumption from relatively clean North American facilities to relatively dirty ones in China — the U.S. already is a net exporter of coal, and China is the world’s largest importer of it. Global energy markets are no great respecters of idealism, and the gentlemen in Beijing and New Delhi (and elsewhere) cannot reasonably be expected to adopt policies that will materially lower the standards of living of their respective peoples in order to satisfy the moral longings of Western elites. We don’t expect the powers that be in Washington to do so, either, and Trump here has chosen the right course.

If you consider climate change a moral issue — and acting on it a moral imperative — then the Paris Agreement might look attractive: The desire to do something, anything at all, is very strong in environmental circles. But the question is more intelligently viewed as a question of risk assessment and cost–benefit trade-offs, in which case planning for future adaptation programs is the more intelligent course of action. As the Natural Resources Defense Council estimates the costs (and NRDC is not exactly the Heritage Foundation), the total costs of climate change to the United States — expansively defined to include everything from hurricane damage to higher food costs — would run less than 2 percent of GDP a century from now. Other studies have produced similar findings. Taking radical and expensive action in the present to avoid the possibility of a 1.8 percent hit to a GDP that will be much larger in the year 2100 than it is today is a losing proposition — especially given that the Paris Agreement is far from guaranteed to produce any meaningful results.

Climate change presents the world with genuine risks, and there is of course room for international action in addressing them. But the Paris Agreement takes the wrong approach, committing the United States to a high-cost/low-return program that secures neither our national interests nor global environmental interests. It is part of the Obama administration’s legacy of putting sentiment over substance, and the United States is better off without it.

READ MORE:
The Paris Agreement Is a Treaty. Treat It as Such.
Let the Senate Just Say ’Non!’ to the Paris Agreement
We Won’t Always Have Paris
Trump’s Stupid and Reckless Climate Decision

By BILL McKIBBEN  JUNE 1, 2017

People say, if all you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail. We should be so lucky. President Trump has a hammer, but all he’ll use it for is to smash things that others have built, as the world looks on in wonder and in fear. The latest, most troubling example is his decision to obliterate the Paris climate accord: After nearly 200 years of scientific inquiry and over 20 years of patient diplomacy that united every nation save Syria and Nicaragua, we had this afternoon’s big game-show Rose Garden reveal: Count us out.

It’s a stupid and reckless decision — our nation’s dumbest act since launching the war in Iraq. But it’s not stupid and reckless in the normal way. Instead, it amounts to a thorough repudiation of two of the civilizing forces on our planet: diplomacy and science. It undercuts our civilization’s chances of surviving global warming, but it also undercuts our civilization itself, since that civilization rests in large measure on those two forces.

Science first. Since the early 1800s we’ve been slowly but surely figuring out the mystery of how our climate operates — why our planet is warmer than it should be, given its distance from the sun. From Fourier to Foote and Tyndall, from Arrhenius to Revelle and Suess and Keeling, researchers have worked out the role that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases play in regulating temperature. By the 1980s, as supercomputers let us model the climate with ever greater power, we came to
understand our possible fate. Those big brains, just in time, gave us the warning we required.

And now, in this millennium, we’ve watched the warning start to play out. We’ve seen 2014 set a new global temperature record, which was smashed in 2015 and smashed again in 2016. We’ve watched Arctic sea ice vanish at a record pace and measured the early disintegration of Antarctica’s great ice sheets. We’ve been able to record alarming increases in drought and flood and wildfire, and we’ve been able to link them directly to the greenhouse gases we’ve poured into the atmosphere. This is the largest-scale example in the planet’s history of the scientific method in operation, the continuing dialectic between hypothesis and skepticism that arrived eventually at a strong consensus about the most critical aspects of our planet’s maintenance. Rational people the world around understand. As Bloomberg Businessweek blazoned across its cover the week after Hurricane Sandy smashed into Wall Street, “It’s Global Warming, Stupid.”

But now President Trump (and 22 Republican senators who wrote a letter asking him to take the step) is betting that all of that is wrong. Mr. Trump famously called global warming a hoax during the campaign, and with this decision he’s wagering that he was actually right — he’s calling his own bluff. No line of argument in the physical world supports his claim, and no credible authority backs him, not here and not abroad. It’s telling that he simultaneously wants to cut the funding for the satellites and ocean buoys that monitor our degrading climate. Every piece of data they collect makes clear his foolishness. He’s simply insisting that physics isn’t real.

But it’s not just science that he’s blowing up. The Paris accord was a high achievement of the diplomatic art, a process much messier than science, and inevitably involving compromise and unseemly concession. Still, after decades of work, the world’s negotiators managed to bring along virtually every nation: the Saudis and the low-lying Marshall Islanders, the Chinese and the Indians. One hundred and ninety-five nations negotiated the Paris accord, including the United States.
The dysfunctional American political process had already warped the process, of course. The reason Paris is a series of voluntary agreements and not a real treaty is because the world had long since understood that no binding document would ever get two-thirds of the vote in our oil-soaked Senate. And that’s despite the fact that the agreement asks very little of us: President Barack Obama’s mild shift away from coal-fired power and toward higher-mileage cars would have satisfied our obligations.

Those changes, and similar ones agreed to by other nations, would not have ended global warming. They were too small. But the hope of Paris was that the treaty would send such a strong signal to the world’s governments, and its capital markets, that the targets would become a floor and not a ceiling; that shaken into action by the accord, we would start moving much faster toward renewable energy, maybe even fast enough to begin catching up with the physics of global warming. There are signs that this has been happening: The plummeting price of solar energy just this spring persuaded India to forgo a huge planned expansion of coal plants in favor of more solar panel arrays to catch the sun. China is shutting coal mines as fast as it can build wind turbines.

And that’s precisely the moment President Trump chose to make his move, a bid to undercut our best hope for a workable future in a bizarre attempt to restore the past. A few fossil-fuel barons may be pleased (Vladimir Putin likely among them, since his reign rests on the unobstructed development of Russia’s hydrocarbons), but most of the country and the world see this for the disaster it is. **Majorities in every single state**, red and blue alike, wanted America to stay in the accord.

And so we will resist. As the federal government reneges on its commitments, the rest of us will double down on ours. Already cities and states are committing to 100 percent renewable energy. Atlanta was the latest to take the step. We will make sure that every leader who hesitates and waffles on climate will be seen as another Donald Trump, and we will make sure that history will judge that name with the contempt it deserves. Not just because he didn’t take climate change seriously, but also because he didn’t take civilization seriously.

**Bill McKibben** is a founder of 350.org and teaches environmental studies at Middlebury College.
Let the Senate Just Say ‘Non!’ to the Paris Agreement

Through Obama’s Clean Power Plan, it would devastate the U.S. economy.

By Deroy Murdock — June 1, 2017

America must flee the Paris Agreement, and the Senate is the emergency exit.

President Donald J. Trump will decide, in his words, “very soon” whether the United States will remain enslaved by Obama’s signature on the United Nations’ deal to battle “global warming.” This budget-busting, job-killing scam fails miserably on its own terms. At best, it would have a microscopic impact on this imaginary “crisis.” So President Trump should keep his campaign promise and rescue America from this nonsensical accord. The question is: How?

Trump may be tempted to withdraw from this deal unilaterally, much as Obama trampled the rule of law by ignoring Congress and single-handedly roping this anvil around America’s collective neck. Instead, President Trump should obey the Constitution and submit the Paris pact to the Senate for its consideration. It almost certainly would fail to score the 67 votes required for passage, which would spell its doom.

And that doom would be well deserved.

Obama’s 1,560-page Clean Power Plan (CPP) embodies the cold iron shackles, ball, and chain that the Paris Agreement would slap onto the U.S. economy. According to Obama’s White House, the Paris-driven CPP would establish a “goal of reducing emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.” This is vague and gassy. Cutting energy-related carbon dioxide 27 percent below 2005’s output of 6 billion metric tons means that 2025’s yield cannot exceed 4.4 billion metric tons. America last produced that annual maximum in 1983.

In other words, the 335 million Americans whom the Census Bureau expects will live here 7.5 years hence would be restricted to no more CO2 than what 234 million Americans produced 42 years earlier.
How will 1983’s CO2 “crop” serve 101 million more Americans than existed back then? Easy: Handcuff the U.S. economy.

Based on data from Obama’s Energy Information Administration, I calculate that the Paris Agreement, via the CPP, will do the following between 2015 and 2040:

- Slash real gross domestic product by $993 billion ($39.7 billion per year, on average).
- Slice real disposable income by $382 billion ($15.3 billion, annually).
- Chop manufacturing shipments by $1.13 trillion ($45.4 billion).
- Whack manufacturing jobs by 1.7 million (68,000).
- Hack non-farm jobs by 900,000 (35,000).
- Cut light-vehicle sales by 310,000 units (12,400).

(For my detailed estimate of the potential damage from the Paris Agreement and CPP, please click here.)

**murdock-chart-satellite-small.jpg**

(View larger chart)
Satellite-based observations cast enormous shadows on the entire theory of so-called global warming. As former NASA scientist and climatologist Roy Spencer and atmosphericist John Christy document each month, readings from space-based gauges show that Earth’s average temperature peaked in early 1998 and stayed well below that high until an early 2016 spike, from which temperatures soon tumbled anew. These data — untainted by exhaust fans and even barbecue grills that affect federal, land-based measurement stations — refute the allegedly inexorable and menacing warming trend that gives Al Gore and his followers the vapors.

murdock-chart-cpp-small.jpg

(View larger chart)

Even if one sincerely believes that Earth is on the verge of boiling in a cauldron of carbon dioxide, the Paris Agreement and CPP do amazingly close to nothing to help. If all goes perfectly — and China and India quit coal, cold turkey — CPP would curb predicted warming in 2050 by a whopping 0.02 degrees Fahrenheit. This is like spinning a thermostat dial from 72 degrees way, way, way down to 71.98 degrees. If incinerating $993 billion in GDP buys this little global cooling through 2040, a one-degree Fahrenheit reduction in anticipated temperature growth between 2015 and 2050 would cost Americans $70 trillion.

The Paris Agreement is science fiction.

What’s worse, other nations already are cutting corners, if not cheating on this deal. One con-job involves biomass, an energy source composed of organic material, often including wood and recycled wood products.
“European nations publicly keen to boost their climate credentials by switching to ‘green’ biomass are accused of working behind the scenes to expunge their carbon emissions from burning wood in power stations from national emissions statistics,” Fred Pearce reported in New Scientist on May 23.

“Across Europe, when large power plants switch from burning coal to burning biomass from forests, this is considered ‘green,’ and they are not required to account for their carbon emissions,” Sasha Stashwick, senior advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council, told New Scientist. “But the atmosphere doesn’t care about our accounting tricks. Burning wood for electricity increases carbon pollution for many decades compared to coal.”

Austria, Finland, France, and Sweden are among the nations that are behaving like obesity patients who promise their doctors that they will consume no more than 1,500 calories per day and then conveniently “forget” to count the cookies and potato chips that they devour.

Pearce also reported that these nations have accelerated their deforestation, to fuel their biomass-powered plants. This is severely un-green: “Fewer trees will mean less carbon being soaked up from the atmosphere,” Pearce observed.

Thus, the Paris Agreement and Europe’s biomass boom are an eco-swindle that would defraud and impoverish America while potentially making the status quo de carbone even worse.

Paul Driessen, senior policy adviser with the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, captures the profoundly un-Trumpian nature of this America Last fandango:

Developing countries are under no obligation to reduce their fossil fuel use or carbon dioxide emissions. Only we developed nations are. This means we are supposed to give developing countries $100 billion per year while we slash our fossil-fuel use, switch to expensive, unreliable renewable energy, and trash our economies.

(C-Fact, several of whose events I have addressed, has sponsored a petition for U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.)

For these reasons and more, this treaty most assuredly would fail to secure the 67 votes needed for Senate approval.

As well it should.

Handing the Paris Agreement to the Senate, and urging its rejection, would be good policy and good politics for President Trump and the GOP.
If the president vacates Paris by fiat, the frenzied, Trump-hating Left will erupt in its most spastic outburst yet. For liberals, “global warming” is Satan, and fighting it is their faith. This theory, for them, is “settled,” above scientific skepticism, and beyond debate. For those who worship in the Church of Climate Change, Trump’s ditching the Paris Agreement would be the firebombing of its basilica.

The Paris Agreement is the catechism by which meddlesome liberals hope to tell Americans how to live their lives — how much electricity to use, what cars they may drive, how to wash their dishes, how to shower, and so on. Statists will not surrender these marble tablets easily.

The Left’s ensuing rage will fuel hysterical cries that Trump is demented, dangerous, and must be impeached, removed for incapacity under the Constitution’s 25th Amendment, or both.

Instead, Trump’s transmission of the Paris Agreement to the Senate for its advice and consent would show the legislative branch respect, rather than the disdain that Obama displayed by circumventing Congress on this momentous matter. The senators who would assess this treaty include Democrats in five swing states that Trump won in November and five more in states that Trump and 2012 nominee Mitt Romney both secured: Indiana’s Joe Donnelly, Missouri’s Claire McCaskill, Montana’s Jon Tester, North Dakota’s Heidi Heitkamp, and West Virginia’s Joe Manchin.

Trump-loathing journalists, activists, and politicians will have trouble tarring him as a modern-day Dr. No if Democrats help him say, “Non!” to the Paris pact.

And if these Democrat senators in Trump and Trump-Romney states support this calamitous deal — America’s economy and their constituents’ jobs be damned — Trump can make them and their votes famous before the November 2018 mid-term elections.

Either way, this escape route out from Paris would be the path to victory for American workers, the GOP, and President Donald J. Trump.

**RELATED:**

*The Paris Agreement Is a Treaty, Treat Is as Such.*

*The Non-Existent Case for the Paris Accord*

*We Won’t Always Have Paris*

— Deroy Murdock is a Manhattan-based Fox News contributor and a contributing editor of National Review Online.
Editorial Boards Praise President Trump’s Paris Decision

“*What the nation won’t do, thanks to the president, is devastate its own economy against the public’s wishes in order to satisfy the global elite. Count this as a major Trump promise kept.*” – New York Post

**THE NEW YORK POST: “In Ditching Paris Deal, Trump Does Right By America And The World”**

In quitting the Paris Accord, President Trump on Thursday did nothing to shift the course of US environmental policy — not even on carbon emissions. But he did put the world on notice that no president can unilaterally commit this nation to such far-reaching agreements. … Yet America will continue to cut its carbon emissions: They’re already down by a fifth since 2000, thanks to fracking and the gradual replacement of coal plants with natural-gas ones. That’s better than Europe did as it implemented Kyoto by making electricity cost twice as much as it does here. Nor did Paris make sense. As Danish economist Bjorn Lomborg notes, it entails...
costs of over $1 trillion a year to shave 0.36 degrees Fahrenheit off global temperatures by 2100 — a tenth the reduction it said is necessary. … America has far cleaner air and water than it did 50 years ago, and more parkland. It should continue those trends, and keep reducing its carbon emissions — democratically. What the nation won’t do, thanks to the president, is devastate its own economy against the public’s wishes in order to satisfy the global elite. Count this as a major Trump promise kept.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL: “Trump Bids Paris Adieu” President Trump announced the U.S. will withdraw from the Paris climate agreement on Thursday, to the horror of green elites world-wide. If the decision shows he is more mindful of American economic interests than they are, the other virtue of pulling out is to expose the fraudulence of this Potemkin village. … But amid the outrage, the aggrieved still haven’t gotten around to resolving the central Paris contradiction, which is that it promises to be Earth-saving but fails on its own terms. It is a pledge of phony progress. The 195 signatory nations volunteered their own carbon emission-reduction pledges, known as ‘intended nationally determined contributions,’ or INDCs. China and the other developing nations account for 63% of annual global CO2 emissions, and their share is rising. They submitted INDCs that pledged to peak the carbon status quo ‘around’ 2030, and maybe later, or never, since Paris included no enforcement mechanisms to prevent cheating. Meanwhile, the developed OECD nations—responsible for 55% of world CO2 as recently as 2000—made unrealistic assurances that even they knew they could not achieve. As central-planning prone as the Obama Administration was, it never identified a tax-and-regulation program that came close to meeting its own emissions pledge of 26% to 28% reductions from 2005 levels by 2025.

NATIONAL REVIEW: “We’ll Never Have Paris” President Donald Trump has decided to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord. The United States never should have been in it in the first place, and it’s not even entirely clear that it ever was. In choosing American interests over Davos pieties — in the face of resistance from some within his own administration — the president here has made good on his promise to put America first. The Paris Agreement is a treaty in all but name: The European signatories put it through their usual treaty-ratification protocols, but the United States did not. President Obama went to great lengths to pretend that the treaty was something other than a treaty because he did not wish to submit it for ratification by the Senate, which was almost sure to reject it — as, indeed, the Senate would likely reject it today. In a government of laws, process matters. Substance matters, too, and here the Paris Agreement is deficient.

INVESTOR’S BUSINESS DAILY: “By Leaving Paris Climate-Change Deal, Trump Will Do U.S. Economy A ‘Yuuuge’ Favor” Climate Change: President Trump is letting it be known that he intends to take the U.S. out of the Paris Accords on climate change. While it will no doubt cause a political flap, it’s a smart move that ends the cynical charade of limiting climate change by shrinking our economy. … This is another reason why Donald Trump's election
has been so fortunate; had all this taken place under President Hillary Clinton, the U.S. would today be saddled with economy-killing regulations that would have destroyed our prosperity and cost us hundreds of billions of dollars a year for nothing in return.

WASHINGTON TIMES: *The Promise To Keep* President Trump said during the campaign last year that the rest of the world is laughing behind America’s back, and never would that be more evident than if the United States becomes a party to the ruinous Paris accord. This is a shakedown of the American taxpayer for a treaty that will do nothing to save or clean up the planet. This might be worth the cost, as enormous as it would be, if there were a genuine environmental benefit. Alas, there is none. China and India — by far the two largest polluters — have announced they will build hundreds of new coal-fired plants to power economic expansion. They’re not about to let climate change concerns stall their economic engines. China first, India first, and no apology. But America is expected to sign a treaty that would decree that for every coal plant closed in Ohio or shuttered in West Virginia, China and India would build 10 new plants.
Should the U.S. Import Drugs to Drive Down Costs?

MAY 1, 2017

To the Editor:

Re “How to Stop Drug Price Gouging” (Op-Ed, April 20):

Tim Wu is right about the problem, but his solution is not a good one.

The federal government is finally putting in place a “track and trace” system to secure the pharmaceutical supply chain. Assurance of product identity and safety (and protection from counterfeiting) is at risk with importation outside a regulated supply system.

Canada’s drugs are cheaper than ours because its single-payer health care system negotiates prices. Our government is forbidden by law from doing so (for the Medicare and Medicaid programs). Repeal would have immediate significant impact.

A longer range solution, in the generic drug area, would be for a well-funded nonprofit to go into the generic drug business. Competition would drive down prices; the nonprofit could use its reasonable profits to support its health mission.

This solution requires legislation to mandate that the Food and Drug Administration speedily approve any sound generic drug application from a nonprofit for a drug whose price has risen sharply. The threat of drawing quick competition, as well as that competition itself, would be effective.
MARSHA COHEN, SAN FRANCISCO

The writer teaches food and drug law at U.C. Hastings College of the Law.

To the Editor:

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JIM GREENWOOD, WASHINGTON

The writer is president and chief executive of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization.
Americans have clear reason to think they’re paying too much for prescription drugs. The cost of medicines is rising faster than any other category of health-care spending, standing at almost 17 percent of total health costs.

What’s harder to discern is what to do about it, in part because so little is known about how drug prices are set, what discounts and rebates drugmakers negotiate with wholesale buyers, and to what extent savings are passed along to customers at the pharmacy counter. Addressing this lack of transparency would be a good first step.

Many politicians suspect that some companies are “getting away with murder,” as Donald Trump put it a few months ago. Efforts have begun in Congress and state legislatures to find out, by demanding more information on drug price-setting.

In the U.S. Senate, Ron Wyden of Oregon has put forward a bill that would force pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs -- the middlemen that oversee prescription-drug arrangements for group health-insurance plans -- to disclose the discounts and rebates they negotiate with pharmaceutical companies, and how much of their savings they pass along to consumers.
Drug companies, themselves facing criticism for high prices, say they routinely rebate to PBMs more than a third of the list price for brand-name medicines -- but when PBMs charge consumers their co-insurance share, they calculate it according to the full list price. Wyden’s bill would find out the degree to which that’s true, and eventually require a certain share of PBM discounts to be passed along. That could lower drug costs for many patients.

As for their own tendency to continually raise drug prices, pharmaceutical makers argue that they have to, because it’s so expensive to create new drugs and bring them to market. This is the part of the picture that several state legislatures are trying to illuminate, by requiring drug companies to disclose their research and development costs.

A new law in Vermont, for instance, requires drug companies to submit detailed cost breakdowns to justify price hikes of more than 50 percent over the past five years. The Maryland legislature has just passed legislation that would procure similar information, and empower the state attorney general to sue for “price gouging.” And a bill in the California Senate would force drugmakers to announce big price hikes and say why they’re needed.

Here again, the sunshine could help, if only to reveal the extent to which drugmakers are genuinely bound by the costs of innovation. It’s not obvious, however, how states could use the information to push prices down, given that their Medicaid programs are required to cover almost all drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration. In any case, the final goal should be to see that prices reflect not just R&D costs but medical value.

To that end, the transparency that’s most needed in the U.S. involves how well individual drugs work in comparison with other treatments. The U.S. should support comparative studies, as several other countries do, to get a clearer picture of each medicine’s cost-effectiveness. This information could guide all efforts by government -- and by doctors and hospitals, as well -- to lower spending on prescription drugs.

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The Opinion Pages | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER

How to Stop Drug Price Gouging
Tim Wu  APRIL 20, 2017

One of Donald Trump’s few universally welcomed campaign promises was to do something about the prices of pharmaceutical drugs. Most Americans recognize that prices are too high, and are bothered by the rise of pharmaceutical price gouging: the giant price increase for decades-old drugs and devices by the likes of Martin Shkreli with Daraprim or Mylan with the EpiPen. But what few people realize is that the president already has the power to do something about drug prices if he really wants to. If Mr. Trump wishes to show he’s serious about his populist promise, the place to start is by declaring war on the price gougers.

The key power is found in the “import relief” law — an important yet unused provision of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 that empowers the Food and Drug Administration to allow drug imports whenever they are deemed safe and capable of saving Americans money. The savings in the price-gouging cases would be significant. Daraprim, the antiparasitic drug whose price was raised by Mr. Shkreli to nearly $750 per pill, sells for a little more than $2 overseas. The cancer drug Cosmegen is priced at $1,400 or more per injection here, as opposed to about $20 to $30 overseas.

The remedy is simple: The government can create a means for pharmacies to get supplies from trusted nations overseas at much lower prices. Doing this would not only save Americans a lot of money but also deflate the incentive to engage in abusive pricing in the first place.

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Why hasn’t the law been used? Over the years, the industry has tried to describe
the statute as a nuclear option, repeatedly warning of the catastrophic danger of
relying on the drugs used by those reckless Canadians. More legalistically, the
industry has insisted that the Department of Health and Human Services (which
oversees the F.D.A.) cannot reliably certify that imports would “pose no additional
risks to public health and safety” as the statute requires. But Health and Human
Services is an executive agency, bound to obey the president, and the needed cost
and safety determinations are well within its capacity.

The safety fears, if not purely imaginary, are wildly exaggerated. Twenty-five
percent or more of drugs labeled American-made are actually manufactured in other
countries, in plants inspected by the F.D.A. (So are 80 percent of the active
ingredients used in the production of drugs in American factories.) The “imports”
that the industry refers to are the same pills as those “American-made” drugs,
produced by the same F.D.A.-inspected plants overseas. The only difference is that
some of those drugs are shipped to countries like Canada, while others are sent
directly to the United States, where they are sold for 10 or sometimes hundreds of
times the Canadian price.

The F.D.A., in other words, is already regulating imported drugs. It might as
well use those powers to fight price gouging. Indeed, over the past six years the
F.D.A. has been allowing imports of drugs to deal with shortages in accordance with
a 2011 executive order. For example, when facing shortages of the cancer drug Doxil,
the F.D.A. authorized imports of a substitute, Lipodox, manufactured at an F.D.A.-
inspected plant in India. Lives have been saved, not lost, and the practice confirms
that this country already knows how to ensure that importing drugs from trusted
nations can be safe. The industry’s “safety” warnings are more politics than reality.

President Trump can do serious damage to the pharmaceutical price-gougers if he
wants to, and will be cheered on by everyone who is not on the payroll of the
pharmaceutical industry, and even some of them as well. A suitably aggressive
beginning would be to select the 10 most outrageous instances of excessive pricing (I
would define that as an unjustified price increase of more than 1,000 percent for a
drug that is no longer protected by a patent). Go after the worst offenders first: the
owners of drugs like Daraprim, Cosmegen, Thiola, Mustargen and Indocin, all of
which have had price increases of 1,000 percent to 5,000 percent. Let companies like Ovation, Turing, Valeant, Mylan and other abusers of the system become a warning to others who might want to make price-gouging their business model.

Obviously, waging war on pharmaceutical pricing abuses would not represent a full solution to the broader problems in drug pricing. Congressional proposals, including a new Senate bill introduced by Bernie Sanders, independent of Vermont, Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken, Democrats of Minnesota, and others, would go further. But it would be the beginning of imposing discipline on an industry accustomed to its absence and a signal that this administration is serious about using the powers it has to make drugs affordable.

President Trump ran as an economic populist who would take on industry on behalf of the people. Here, the people clearly want something done. All it really takes is a chief executive who has the courage that he claims.

**Correction: April 26, 2017**

An Op-Ed article on Thursday about controlling the prices of prescription drugs misspelled, in one instance, the name of the maker of the EpiPen. It is Mylan, not Mylar. Tim Wu, the author of “The Attention Merchants: The Epic Struggle to Get Inside Our Heads,” is a professor at Columbia Law School and a contributing opinion writer.

A version of this op-ed appears in print on April 20, 2017, on Page A23 of the New York edition with the headline: How to Stop Drug Price Gouging.
The Opinion Pages | LETTERS

Should the U.S. Import Drugs to Drive Down Costs?

MAY 1, 2017

To the Editor:

Re “How to Stop Drug Price Gouging” (Op-Ed, April 20):

Tim Wu is right about the problem, but his solution is not a good one.

The federal government is finally putting in place a “track and trace” system to secure the pharmaceutical supply chain. Assurance of product identity and safety (and protection from counterfeiting) is at risk with importation outside a regulated supply system.

Canada’s drugs are cheaper than ours because its single-payer health care system negotiates prices. Our government is forbidden by law from doing so (for the Medicare and Medicaid programs). Repeal would have immediate significant impact.

A longer range solution, in the generic drug area, would be for a well-funded nonprofit to go into the generic drug business. Competition would drive down prices; the nonprofit could use its reasonable profits to support its health mission.

This solution requires legislation to mandate that the Food and Drug Administration speedily approve any sound generic drug application from a nonprofit for a drug whose price has risen sharply. The threat of drawing quick competition, as well as that competition itself, would be effective.
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Tuesday, April 11, 2017

"As an independent water utility, the sole focus of Des Moines Water Works is to provide safe and affordable drinking water to the 500,000 Iowans we serve. Water quality is an issue that we take very seriously and the conclusion of the lawsuit will not change that," said Bill Stowe, CEO and General Manager, Des Moines Water Works. "While many in the agriculture community and state political leadership took issue with the lawsuit, nobody objected to the facts showing drainage districts are polluters. The risks remain and demand immediate accountability to protect our state."

The ruling dismissing the case did not dispute the assertion that drainage districts cause water quality problems in the Raccoon River Watershed. Rather, the court indicated that Des Moines Water Works may well have suffered an injury, but the drainage districts lack the legal ability to redress that injury.

According to Stowe, "Policy and law must keep pace as public health and water quality concerns demonstrate both risk and cost to water consumers; that includes 100-year old Iowa Code dealing with drainage districts and implementation of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy."

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy estimates that 92% of nitrate in Iowa’s water comes from unregulated sources, namely agriculture, and 8% from regulated sources, such as sewer systems. Without proper funding and water quality data to measure progress, the Nutrient Reduction Strategy cannot produce the 45% nitrogen reduction goal. The court’s ruling noted this argument, and concluded these are policy issues the Iowa Legislature should resolve.

“Central Iowa will continue to be burdened with expensive, serious and escalating water pollution problems; the lawsuit was an attempt to protect our ratepayers, whose public health and quality of life continue to be impacted by unregulated industrial agriculture,” said Stowe. “These serious problems have been placed squarely on the shoulders of our state legislators. The old, business-as-usual, voluntary-only approach will never result in the 45% nitrogen reduction. We hope that, rather than wasting valuable time and resources crafting legislation designed to punish Des Moines Water Works for filing the lawsuit, our legislators can create bold laws that address water pollution. True source water protection is vital to our customers and community.

About Des Moines Water Works

Des Moines Water Works (DMWW) is a municipal water utility serving the citizens of Des Moines and surrounding communities - approximately 500,000 customers. DMWW is an independently operated public utility with a commitment to leading, advocating and investing today and in the future to deliver water you can trust for life.
Our identity as a state is deeply rooted in our past and present rendezvous with the land. We have a history, in Iowa, of conserving our resources while producing for our communities. Whether urban or rural, Iowans thrived in a healthy environment. That notion may be slipping from our very grasp.

Des Moines Water Works (DMWW) is currently locked in a legal battle with three Iowa counties that operate drainage districts. DMWW, which provides drinking water for about 500,000 central Iowans, was seeking damages from the drainage districts for having to operate its nitrate removal facility to meet Environmental Protection Agency standards to the tune of $7,000 a day. But the Iowa Supreme Court ruled in late January that the drainage districts could not be sued for damages under current Iowa law.

What does this mean? Environmentalists will call it a setback. Farmers will say it is a battle won, but more victories need to follow. The truth, as usual, falls in the middle. Where we stand after the ruling is where we started. Our rivers, streams and lakes in Iowa are still choked with runoff from
farms and parking lots. Sediment from rapid and severe soil erosion freely deposits our topsoil downstream. Des Moines still has to operate an expensive facility to provide safe drinking water to half a million people.

The lawsuit was a bold move by DMWW, and it still may pay off for the water utility company. If it wins the next fight, which involves expanding Clean Water Act regulations to area drainage districts, then farmers could be forced to spend money to show that they are complying with federal laws. If they lose, however, farmers could continue their operations unaltered and consumers in Des Moines will still foot the bill.

This is an excellent time, with one ruling down and another pending, for both sides to come to the table to demand that legislators and the governor come up with a compromise. Iowans have had enough of each side spending millions of dollars in the court room and not on implementing solutions.

Here at Iowa State, researchers and extension officials are testing and publishing methods and practices that reduce the runoff of soil and nutrients into area waterways. Students who will be future farmers and consumers are learning that steps can be taken to grow food in a sustainable way.

We know that it is within our capacity to provide safe drinking water, nutritious food, livable incomes and a healthy environment to the future generations. But, instead of whole-heartedly working toward these solutions, we are slinking back into our corners and blaming those across the room. In a sign of unity and progress, our legislators, urban and rural, Democrat and Republican, need to come together and create a plan that respects our farms and saves our water.

If this becomes the proverbial can-kicked-down-the-road because no one wants to show leadership, then the future looks bleak for our waterways and farmers alike.

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**Letter to the Editor Submission Link**
Urban and rural interests sometimes collide in the Midlands — over school aid, tax policy and more. State leaders have an important obligation to bring people together to seek a reasonable reconciliation of such disagreements.

That’s the need in Iowa, given ongoing frictions between ag producers and an independent utility serving the Des Moines area.

Des Moines Waterworks filed suit several years ago against three northwestern Iowa counties over high nitrate levels in the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers, from which the utility draws water.

Nitrate levels in the rivers have been measured up to four times what is allowed under federal regulations. The utility says it has spent millions of dollars to remove pollution. The lawsuit was an attempt to spur ag producers and state officials to step up efforts to reduce the runoff.
A federal judge has dismissed the lawsuit, saying the utility lacks the legal standing to file the suit. Meanwhile, Iowa state lawmakers are considering legislation to disband the utility. But even if the utility went away, it’s important to note that the underlying water-quality problem wouldn’t automatically follow.

Iowa needs a robust ag economy. It also needs a capital city that’s able to meet residents’ water quality needs at an affordable level.

It’s a difficult matter certainly, but this is precisely the kind of issue on which local leaders and interest groups need to step up and pursue constructive options, for the good of the state.
You Should Not Have Let Your Baby Die

Sam, your newborn son, has been suffocating in your arms for the past 15 minutes. You’re as certain as you can be that he is going to die in the next 15. He was born two days ago with “trisomy 18,” a disease that proved no obstacle to his cementing himself immediately and forevermore as the love of your life. Your wife has already composed his own lullaby, “Sam, Sam, the Little Man.” But she and you and your three other children have spent the past 24 hours learning about the incredible uphill battle Sam faces.

“Trisomy” means “three chromosomes.” Each cell in your son’s body should have a healthy pair of the chromosomes scientists call No. 18. The unkind twists of the genetic lottery have given him instead a crippling threesome.

Sam was born breech in an emergency procedure in Mary Greeley Hospital, in Ames, Iowa. You and your wife accepted the attending physician’s advice to Life Flight him immediately in a helicopter to the Infant Intensive Care Unit at the Iowa City Hospitals. You were told that Sam could not breathe on his own, although no one ever asked whether you approved his being hooked up to a ventilator. You overheard the emergency personnel relaying in medicales the reasons for the flight to Iowa City: microcephaly, low-set ears, flat midface, short stature, proximally placed thumb and potentially abnormal male genitalia. All signs, you have since
learned, of genetic abnormality, and indicators that he will be, as a friend puts it — choking on the words — “mentally retarded.”

Not all people with trisomy 18 have problems. The literature reports a dozen cases of individuals living for 10 years, and S.O.F.T., a trisomy 18 support group, lists even more living into their 20s and 30s. Those with the conditions known as mosaicism and translocation of the 18 chromosome may live relatively long and happy lives, bring joy to their parents, siblings and friends, and be relatively free of adverse symptoms. But there is a wide range of disorders associated with trisomy, and for those with Sam’s symptoms, life expectancy is brutally short.

Sam’s case is classified as one of the worst. His brain cannot regulate his lungs. He grew successfully in your wife’s body and came to term because her blood provided him with oxygen. Now that his mother can no longer breathe for him, there is, the genetic counselor gently tells you, little chance that he will ever breathe on his own.

Some 1,100 infants are born annually in this country with trisomy 18. Many of them die of heart failure or apnea, irregular breathing that stops temporarily. Sam cannot breathe on his own at all. In an era of less technologically sophisticated medicine, your wife suggests, Sam would have died at birth? Yes. Even with today’s respirators, cardiac support equipment and antibiotics, nearly 30 percent will die in the first month; 90 percent will die before their first birthday. Of those who survive, most will have radical cognitive limitations, a condition the most recent revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders refers to as “profound intellectual disability.”

How do you know? You pose the question to Sam’s geneticist, a kindly man in his mid-40s. He measures his response. He has an M.D. and a Ph.D., and has worked with trisomy infants for 15 years. You like him. You hear in his voice the ring of years of medical practice, scientific research and practical wisdom. You see in his eyes the face of a father. Well, he says, as to the diagnosis of the genetic problem, the results of chromosome analysis are accurate 99.9 percent of the time. As for the prognosis? Unfortunately, Sam seems to have a version of trisomy 18 that makes it
impossible for his brain to successfully stimulate and coordinate the activities of the respiratory tract.

*Are you sure? What would happen if you removed that air hose taped to his face? Have you tried it?* Yes, once, for a few seconds. His lungs showed no signs of beginning to operate on their own. It would be inhumane to experiment on him by leaving the tube out for any longer period of time. He cannot breathe.

*But couldn’t that change?* Yes. Some trisomy 18 babies in Sam’s condition eventually improve to the point at which they no longer need the respirator. Some leave the hospital and begin to respond to their parents’ affection. But a majority never leave the hospital, never respond to the presence of others and die while still connected to the respirator.

*What are the choices?* Some parents choose to use all possible means of continuing their child’s life in the hope that their child will beat the odds and eventually overcome problems. Others choose to let the children die to spare the babies the pain of the ordeal.

*Forget the statistics and what others do or don’t do. We would like to know what our Sam’s chances are for reaching the point where his life is valuable to him.* But there is no answer to that question. No one can tell you whether your son’s life is worth living from his perspective, or yours. We cannot say whether your son will ever breathe on his own or look at you. We can say only that the literature suggests the odds are stacked heavily against him.

You and your wife had no warning during the pregnancy that the child might be genetically abnormal. You were offered the services of amniocentesis, a test that may have revealed his condition. You and your wife refused to have genetic testing done on the fetus because your wife opposes abortion on theological and moral grounds. Knowing ahead of time that the child was genetically abnormal would not have provided any useful information. Genetic testing is done to allow parents the choice to abort fetuses with severe problems. But your wife would never abort her baby, so there was no point in having the tests performed.
The two of you have support in deciding to let your baby die: your wife’s best friend from church, her mother and sister from 2,000 miles away, your own mother and father, your two brothers and sister, and every member of their families, gathered from 300 miles away. They help you think through the decision to remove the air tube. They squirm with you, hesitating to give their opinions. In the end, they express support for your decision. Your brother calls it “courageous.”

There seems to you both a difference between killing your baby and letting him die. You are letting Sam die. Your father gathers the family, nearly 20 adults and children, in the room. You hold hands, collectively sing a psalm, weep through Grandpa’s prayer. Everyone leaves. Your wife tries to sing Sam’s lullaby to him, one last time, goodbye, Sam, but her voice fails her. She hands him to you. She cannot bear to go through it. Your brother and mother have offered to sit with you, but you decide it is something you must do alone. Just you and Sam.

The nurse comes in, mute. You look at him, sleeping. He seems at peace. You nod your head. She gently pulls the tube. It slides out quickly, as though he were helping to expel it. Without his lifeline, he does not move. A minute later, his eyes open. It is the first time you have seen them. His head jerks slightly forward. He does not cry. He gasps silently for breath. His eyes close. You almost yell for the nurse, to beg her to put it back in. To keep from doing so, you pray, arguing with God that letting him die is best for him. After five minutes, his face pales, then turns a sickly purple. His tiny chest convulses irregularly in an unsuccessful attempt to draw air into the lungs. After 20 minutes, he lies still. His fingers turn gray.

Thirty minutes. There are no visible signs of life. You rock his limp body as tears fall on the blue blanket. You wonder what sort of beast you are. Forty-five minutes. Grandma looks in, ashen faced, seeing in a glance that it is over. Shortly your wife appears. She immediately takes her son’s body in her arms and coddles him. She sits there with him for three hours.

You should not have let your baby die. You should have killed him.

This thought occurs to you years later, thinking about the gruesome struggle of his last 20 minutes. You are not sure whether it makes sense to talk about his life, because he never seemed to have the things that make a life: thoughts, wants,
desires, interests, memories, a future. But supposing that he had thoughts, his strongest thought during those last minutes certainly appeared to be: “This hurts. Can’t someone help it stop?” He didn’t know your name, but if he had, he would have said: “Daddy? Please. Now.”

It seems the medical community has few options to offer parents of newborns likely to die. We can leave our babies on respirators and hope for the best. Or remove the hose and watch the child die a tortured death. Shouldn’t we have another choice? Shouldn’t we be allowed the swift humane option afforded the owners of dogs, a lethal dose of a painkiller?

For years you repress the thought. Then, early one morning, remembering again those last minutes, you realize that the repugnant has become reasonable. The unthinkable has become the right, the good. Painless. Quickly. With the assistance of a trained physician.

You should have killed your baby.

Gary Comstock is a professor of philosophy at North Carolina State University.


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EDITORIAL: Facebook's impressive response to fake news

By Editorial Board

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An important part of internet use in the United States is the ability to access and interpret content freely without restrictive interference from any particular entity that claims to decide what is true.

News organizations have an obligation to guide users to credible sources.

The social media site Facebook announced Dec. 15 it would begin to address the fake news problem by making fake news easier to report and by working with fact-checking organizations.

If one of those organizations — including Snopes, PolitiFact, the Associated Press, factcheck.org, and ABC News — deems an article false, Facebook will mark it as “disputed” to warn users that the validity of its content is questionable.

Once marked, users who attempt to share a story will receive a pop-up to warn them about its content, and the story will occupy a lower positions in users’ news feeds.

Many of the sites that post such articles make money through third-party advertising, and these sites will lose the ability to insert themselves into ads on Facebook and to display Facebook ads on their own pages.

As of September 2016, Facebook is also a member of the First Draft News Coalition, a Google-backed organization that includes partners such as Twitter, the New York Times, CNN, and the Washington Post. The aim of the coalition is to help these organizations manage the process of verifying true stories and stopping the spread of fake stories.

All of these measures guard users against false content without making Facebook employees official arbiters of truth, as Facebook News Feed Vice President Adam Mosseri wrote in the Dec. 15 release.

Other sites, including popular forum sites Reddit and 4chan, accused of spreading fake news should follow Facebook’s example and implement policies appropriate to their platforms that provide users with similar guidance.

Considering that advertising allows fake news sites to expand circulation and make a profit, social media and real news sites should prioritize policies that limit such deceptive advertisements.

On the level of individual users — especially those who identify as skeptics and place their own judgment above the likes of Facebook, Google, and others with similarly significant internet presences — smart news consumption is essential.

Keep an eye out for red flags, such as articles written by made-up authors, sites that list very little or false contact information, and stories that manipulate authentic news coverage or rely on unprofessional blogs for evidence.

Make use of fact-checking organizations such as the aforementioned sources working with Facebook to verify stories you encounter elsewhere on the internet that seem suspicious. When you plan to share a story, be sure its content is true and its author is authentic and professional. You don’t want to make a fool out of yourself.

We need to respect the truth and those who devote themselves to it. Restoring public trust in the news will be a collaborative process, one in which both organizations and individuals should absolutely participate.

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The helium shutoff -- a side effect of the Qatar confrontation

BYLINE: By Don Lincoln

SECTION: OPINIONS

LENGTH: 951 words

The recent diplomatic dustup between Qatar and many other Gulf nations caused some nervousness for some of the world's most cutting edge scientists.

Among recalled ambassadors, closed borders and massive disruptions on travel and shipping, the diplomatic crisis highlighted the world's vulnerability to cutoffs in the supply of helium, since Qatar is the world's second-biggest producer of the vital substance, after the United States. Although the helium aspect of this diplomatic imbroglio has been resolved, it highlights the way in which international diplomacy can impact scientific research.

While most people might think of helium as simply being the gas that is used for balloons at children's birthday parties, it is actually a critical ingredient for some of the highest technologies on Earth.

It is used in cryogenic environments, like the operation of medical MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and NMR (nuclear magnetic resonance) spectrometers. It is used to purge and pressurize containers made of materials that cannot withstand chemical interactions.

It is used to provide controlled environments for the manufacture of solid-state computer chips. And it is used in tungsten gas welding for such metals as aluminum and copper, which would experience much weaker welds if they were contaminated by exposure to oxygen.

Helium is chemically inert and unique in its ability to remain liquid at temperatures below -450 F (-269 C). It is found in air at low concentrations (about five parts per million) -- a concentration that does not economically allow for easy extraction.

In fact, helium is mostly obtained from natural gas deposits, like the South Pars/North Dome field, which is a natural gas condensate field shared by Iran and Qatar. Qatar stopped helium production on June 13 and only resumed operations on July 2. Had production not been resumed, the impact on scientific research could have been quite worrisome.

Helium is produced in radioactive alpha decay of minerals bearing either uranium or thorium, both of which are
radioactive elements. Alpha decay is the emission of the nucleus of a helium atom. The same sort of geological processes that trap natural gas underground will also trap helium. The concentrations of helium in natural gas deposits vary widely, ranging from a few parts per million to as much as 7% at a small gas field located in New Mexico.

Qatar, with an area smaller than that of Connecticut, produces 25% of the world's helium and the recent diplomatic crisis strongly reduced its ability to ship this valuable commodity.

While the country can still ship natural gas via special facilities near Ras Laffan Industrial City in the north part of the country, helium is normally shipped overland through Saudi Arabia to the Jebel Ali port in the United Arab Emirates. With this shipping route blocked, the helium liquefaction facilities inside Qatar were effectively shut down on June 13.

The necessary helium shipping containers are essentially very large thermos bottles, which eventually warm up when they are emptied. Since the containers were located at the customer's site and not quickly returned to the producer's facility, they warmed and were easily contaminated with air. At liquid helium temperatures, more common gasses are frozen solid; thus a small contamination by ordinary air can form solid blockages in helium transfer pipes. Restarting the cooling plant and reconditioning shipping containers is a very delicate and time-consuming business.

The world's scientific and technical community needs reliable helium supplies and each facility usually stores locally only a few weeks' worth of liquid helium consumption. However, once their reserves are depleted, they become very concerned about how long a reduction in production caused by disruptions like this blockade of Qatar is going to last.

When the helium supply becomes very scarce, this hits medical and scientific users particularly hard. Helium rationing has no system for prioritization; medical facilities do not get special access to the remaining reserves. What drives the distribution in a rationing environment is individual contracts. Previous helium production reductions saw some facilities having their supply reduced by half.

The vulnerability of the world's helium supply is not a new thing. The United States formed an enormous helium reserve in 1925 just outside Amarillo, Texas, in part to ward off situations exactly like those caused by the Qatar blockade. However, in 1996, financial and political pressures led the US government to direct that the helium reserve be sold on the open market by 2006. The reduction of the reserve led to market forces driving the prices of this critical element, further leading to periodic shortages for the scientific community.

So, what should we do to avert future crises like that posed by the Qatar blockade? The first is to continue to further develop existing helium recapture technologies. Although these technologies exist, many existing facilities simply use helium to cool something or as part of their production process and then vent the helium gas to the atmosphere.

Helium's inertness makes this safe, but it is wasteful. If more companies and laboratories would capture the gas and liquefy it, they could recapture the cost of the capture facilities in just a few years. It would also guard against vulnerabilities to shortages caused by geopolitical problems like the Qatar diplomatic crisis.

And, although the world's helium reserves have not been depleted, it is a nonrenewable resource. When it's gone, it's gone. That's true of many substances, but with helium, things are different. There is no known substance that can replace it.

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The media is ruining science

By Robert Gebelhoff  August 17, 2016

A year ago last week, researchers from Drexel University released a study about the benefits of “sexting” in relationships, which included a figure that suggested that the vast majority of adults — around 82 percent — had sexted at some point in the past year. As expected, the surprising statistic was widely covered online, including by CNN, the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, Slate, the Huffington Post and here at The Post.

What was rarely mentioned in these media articles, though, was that the research had not been published in any academic journal. Instead, the data was compiled through an Internet survey as part of a presentation to the American Psychological Association’s annual convention. Sure, the results were interesting, but the research is simply not generalizable to the entire public.

Unfortunately, examples like this are legion in the world of science journalism. As a result, the scientific community has lately been making an effort try to end the stream of misleading articles — going so far as to redesign the way academic journals review and publish studies.

Part of the problem is that there’s a lot of adverse incentive for people to distort scientific studies. Science and health media writers are constantly in need of new, sexy studies (preferably ones that somehow mention “sex” in the headline). Meanwhile, scholars and academic journals face pressure to produce work that gets attention from media outlets — doing so can elevate the stature of their research, which in turn promotes their funding. At the same time, researchers have become very good at playing with data — such as shifting the length of their experiments or picking and choosing which variables to control for — in order to come out with the results they want. (FiveThirtyEight has a great tool that allows you to play with different economic variables to show that the economy had statistically done better under both Republicans and Democrats.)

In between, media agents for research institutions have become adept at turning complicated scientific jargon into compelling press releases — usually at the expense of accuracy. Reporters crop down those releases even further, stretching, exaggerating and torturing academic papers until their original meaning of the study has been completely lost.

Without a doubt, the rising demand for more studies has taken a toll on science’s credibility. In the past decade, researchers have been debating ways to free their work of so-called “publication bias,” including “preregistration” or “results-free” peer review. In this concept, scientists submit their work to academic journals and peer reviewers without the results included. That way, academics would only be allowed to review the methodology and the questions posed at the onset of each study. Theoretically, journals would free themselves of the tendency to only publish papers with exciting findings.
Problem solved, right? Well, it’s a good idea, but it’s not perfect. The academic journal Comparative Political Studies recently pulled together a special issue made up entirely of these “results-free” submissions. In an essay reviewing the resulting papers, CPS editors highlighted some major pitfalls: First of all, studies don’t always go as planned. In peer reviewing methodology first, scientists risk becoming too rigid in their experimental design, making it difficult to carry out their study as promised if they have to adapt to unexpected variables.

Secondly, the results-free model seems to favor some study designs over others — such as quantitative over qualitative designs. There’s also the legitimate concern about what happens if methodologies come out with null results — that is, if the only result a study can produce is to prove the hypothesis incorrect. Such a paper could end up being extraordinarily boring or not answering the essential question at issue. Imagine a headline like: “We don’t know which gene puts you at a greater risk of depression, but we’re pretty sure it’s not the gene we thought it was.”

That’s not to say the “results-free” model is worthless — it does have potential. In fact, the editors lauded the model for incentivizing researchers to focus on theory and research design. The problem is that it simply doesn’t solve all the problems facing scientific publication.

What’s more, it shouldn’t be up to scientists to fix them.

As the CPS essay shows, scientists can only reform themselves so far; a lot of the blame must be put on reporters and the general public. The main problem with scientific studies is not how they are conducted; it’s how they’re consumed. Both the general public and members of the media alike tend to treat studies as if they’re infallible. If a newspaper or a politician cites a newly published scholarly work, rarely do we ever hear someone challenge it.

In all honesty, the best way to challenge scientific findings is simply to find the time and read the original study. Evaluate the methodology for yourself. Are there legitimate limitations to the research? Does the sample size seem large enough? If at any point the answers to these questions seem way over your head and the long gobbledygook of equations looks like another language, try Googling it. Check out other articles on the topic, or simply start with the basics.

The unfortunate reality is that some scholarly research cannot be simplified without giving up essential nuance. The general public can’t blame science for being too hard — it can only blame reporters for not having the intellectual rigor or, more likely, the time to work through the difficult questions.

Robert Gebelhoff contributes to The Washington Post’s Opinions section. 🐦 Follow @RobertGebelhoff
The Case for the Politicization of Science

If you’re going to do something political, like a march, it should be political.

The sorrow of the March for Science did not hit me until I saw a photo from it—an older woman standing next to a homemade sign adorned with Ms. Frizzle.

You know Ms. Frizzle, if only from a PBS ad. She is the elementary-school teacher with the curly red hair at the center of the Magic School Bus books and television show. In every episode, Ms. Frizzle corrals her small class of diverse kids into the Magic School Bus, which then drives to a local swamp, volcano, or human
circulatory system. Then the eponymous magic happens—and the entire class is outfitted in hip waders, floating past a great blue heron; or in SCUBA suits, swimming through a vein past a red blood cell. Ms. Frizzle—not until recently did I notice her egalitarian title—lectures the class on the science of the scene.

No one ever signs a permission slip in *Magic School Bus*, raising questions about Ms. Frizzle’s management of liability risk. But no questions can be raised about her expertise, which seemed to hold the entire experimental curriculum together. She urged her students to “take chances, make mistakes, and get messy.” The world was bright and open and here for the curious.

Now, that remarkable and fictional woman—the discovery-obsessed doyenne whose face is in every public library in America—was here, on a sign, in the rain, near the White House, protesting a president who brags about grabbing women’s vaginas. I felt bad about the shabbiness of the whole scene, and I felt bad specifically for Ms. Frizzle, who, after a lifetime of teaching third graders, has to spend her twilight years doing... this.

It is a miserable time for science. America has an almost non-existent climate policy, its support for basic research is flagging, and its congressmen harass individual scientists in the name of ideology. At the March for Science last Saturday, the speakers and the protesters kept coming back to the same theme: “I can’t believe I have to march for science!”

But that was often as specific as they got. Before the event, organizers said that the march was not for any one particular political goal, but in support of science in general. This was not reflected equally across the event. The protesters who came to D.C. knew who their enemy was. (His name rhymes with Ronald Yump.) But the people on stage held a glorified science-museum presentation.

“This did not begin in November,” Rush Holt, the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a former congressman, told reporters last week. “It’s true the march idea came up in January, but it was built on
a growing concern that reached a level of anxiety about the conditions under which science can thrive.”

This same tepidness also cooled the stage. Speakers encouraged attendees to vote, and they told them to call their representative in Congress. But they rarely funneled attendees to one group or another, or endorsed specific bills or policies. Far more often they reveled in their nerdiness or their shared love of science. Speakers were far more likely to praise historical Americans who took an enlightened view of science than they were to name contemporary ones who opposed it. One speaker singled out Abraham Lincoln for praise—not because he won the Civil War—but because he was so nerdy that he filed a patent.

Exxon Mobil files about 320 patents per year. It employs thousands of scientists. It devotes tens of thousands of dollars to scholarships which support women and minorities in STEM fields. An important idea in the study of geological time scales is called the “Exxon curve,” because it was discovered by Exxon scientists. Exxon also spent $8.8 million last year lobbying American lawmakers. This was actually low: In 2008, it spent $29 million to lobby for the defeat of a climate-change bill.

By any account, then, Exxon loves science. It doesn’t need convincing that science is useful and helpful—certainly, science helps Exxon’s bottom line every day. But when it comes time to shape U.S. policy, Exxon looks out for something that it loves even more than science: itself.

The problem of our political system isn’t an insufficient love of science. Sixty-seven percent of U.S. adults think scientists “should have a major role in policy decisions,” as do nearly half of self-identified conservative Republicans. When you set aside the issue of climate change, Americans of both parties do equally well on tests of basic scientific literacy.

The problem facing the implementation of any kind of sensible climate-change policy—for example—is that many powerful organizations believe they would be harmed by it. Therefore they use the levers of power available to them to oppose it. The U.S. provides $700 billion in subsidies to fossil-fuel companies every year.
These companies are entering politics to protect their material self-interests. These firms may have too much power, but they are not using the political system in a strange way: Protecting your material self-interest is a valid thing to do in politics!

It is true that the status of “science” has changed in American politics, thanks in part to 20 years of party polarization over climate change. But once a depoliticized issue becomes politicized, its supporters can’t win just by shouting that it’s actually uncontroversial. We saw this strategy fail in 2016, when the Trump campaign politicized free trade—and the Clinton campaign responded that free trade wasn’t political. It will fail again for science now, unless its supporters make new arguments for it and win the fight on the merits.

Which is why the March for Science scared me. The worst possible thing for the march is that people believed the rhetoric they were hearing on the stage. It will not help them understand why, after two decades of evidence, the United States has yet to formulate a sensible and science-informed climate policy.

After the March for Science ended, a colleague joked to me: “If they really wanted to be scientific about this, they would have the march again next week.”

The thing is: They are. On Saturday, the March for Climate, Jobs, and Justice will take over downtown Washington, D.C., and dozens of other cities around the country. Unlike the March for Science, it is forthrightly political. It understands itself as part of the broad and intersectional left. It has even divided the route of the march into sections for different aspects of the progressive coalition: one area for labor, another for racial justice groups, another for religious leaders.

This may make some scientists bristle: Should science alloy itself with other members of a political constituency? Their concerns are understandable but misguided. I suspect that in the longterm, it’s the confidently political—confidently partisan—climate marchers who will have the right approach. If you’re going to do something political, like a march, it should be fully political.

In September 2009, tens of thousands of protesters filled the National Mall as part of the the first major Tea Party rally. (Officially, it was called “the Taxpayer March
on Washington.”) One year later, more than 200,000 people attended the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” the dual Jon Stewart-Stephen Colbert rally. One of these marches allied itself with a party and followed up with local organization. The other rejected extremist politics—but it neither supported a party nor asked protesters to organize at home.

Seven years later, it’s the smaller Tea Party rally that still reverberates in our politics. So if scientists want to do politics, they should do it all out. They shouldn’t worry about the stain of asserting their self-interest. They should take chances—they should get messy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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