



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on February 3, 2020

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## Correction, Please!

### Radicals Employ “Science” as Cudgel Against Dissent

**Item:** *The New York Times, in a page one article entitled “Trump Eroding Role of Science in Government,” in its print edition for December 29, stated: “In just three years, the Trump administration has diminished the role of science in federal policymaking while halting or disrupting research projects nationwide, marking a transformation of the federal government whose effects, experts say, could reverberate for years.”*



*The 3,400-plus-word piece (entitled online “Science Under Attack”) leaned heavily on remarks of former and disgruntled personnel who had worked for, or advised, various government departments; it alleged that, in addition to “shutting down some programs, there have been notable instances where the administration has challenged established scientific research.”*

*For instance, said the left-wing paper, aides to Scott Pruitt, “the E.P.A. administrator at the time, told the agency’s economists to redo an analysis of wetlands protections that had been used to help defend an Obama-era clean-water rule.”*

*Other featured examples over multiple years were a “15-person scientific committee on climate change” in the Commerce Department that was “disbanded” in 2017; two “research agencies” that were “gutted” at the Department of Agriculture; and, a “\$1 million study on the health risks of coal mining [that] was canceled” at the Interior Department.*

**Item:** *The Washington Post reported on January 1 that members of the EPA’s Scientific Advisory Board had posted online draft letters critical of proposals by the Trump administration that would “roll back environmental regulations.” According to the article (entitled “EPA advisers warn that rollbacks clash with science”), the proposed “changes would weaken standards that govern waterways and wetlands across the country as well as those that dictate gas mileage for U.S. automobiles.”*

*The comments by the advisers “raise questions about the basis for the [Trump] administration’s push to unspool regulations enacted under President Barack Obama.”*

**Item:** *The Los Angeles Times for December 31 (“Trump’s plans to strip clean water protections leave New Mexico fearing pollution and health risks,” read the headline) reported that Trump’s EPA “plans to roll back clean water rules, abolishing limits on how much pollution can be dumped into small streams and wetlands.”*

*According to the L.A. paper, “Federal data suggest 81% of streams in the Southwest would lose protections. A large share of streams in California and other Western states will be hard hit. Nowhere are the stakes as high as in New Mexico.”*



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**Correction:** Science can help us understand many things, but it cannot show us what ought to be done. That's what predatory politicians and their ideological media allies try to do.

In general, this is scaremongering. It requires us to upend our economy and way of life in order to obey the dictates of our supposed betters in Washington. Science, they insist, demands it.

(It is probably a cheap shot, albeit on target, to recall that Ptolemy's geocentric model for the cosmos was also "established science" for more than a thousand years.)

Not all Americans are enamored of intrusive government regulations. One of them is President Trump. In fact, during 2019, the Trump administration issued the fewest new regulations than in any year since the government began tracking them in 1975, according to Clyde Wayne Crews of the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI). Trump previously pledged to cut two federal regulations for every new one created. In practice, the pace of late has gone well beyond that — reducing "significant" regulations by an 8-to-1 ratio. (And that includes the "regulations" technically added in order to cut earlier regs.)

As you might imagine, many cheered. And the White House said these actions saved more than \$50 billion in regulatory costs — even as the *New York Times* and other left-wing journals bemoaned the developments.

The long-winded *New York Times* critique above gives the fabricated impression (as intended) that the Trump administration is involved in a massive purge of irreplaceable, altruistic civil servants doing God's work. That is fiction.

The 15-person scientific committee "disbanded" some three years ago had explored how to make National Climate Assessments for the Commerce Department; it had not produced a report, according to the administration. The department and its many other activities are still in business. Last year, the department was expected to spend \$14 billion; meanwhile, Commerce still employs (according to the Cato Institute) about 44,000 workers and administers more than 80 subsidy programs.

Employees in the two "gutted" (*NYT* word) Agriculture agencies were told that their jobs were being transferred from D.C. to Kansas City (closer, one notices, to a lot of "agriculture"). Apparently several hundred of those involved in the transferred jobs were cruelly given "less than four months" to decide whether to stay or go. Tell it to the Marines — or countless workers elsewhere in the private sector who have been transferred. Some of the bureaucrats left. The department will survive. It was in line to spend \$156 billion last year; its employees operate (according to Cato) 278 subsidy programs. The department has 90,100 workers in about 7,000 offices across the United States.

And don't spend too much time weeping for the Interior Department because — as featured in the *New York Times* — a \$1 million study was canceled by the heartless, coal-minded, science-hating Trump administration. That department was expected to spend a net \$12 billion in fiscal 2019; it still employs about 66,000 workers and operates 290 subsidy programs.

Do all of these "civil servants" work solely to benefit the American people? That is debatable. *Wall Street Journal* columnist Kimberley Strassel, in her recent detailed and perceptive book *Resistance (At All Costs)*, describes how the "bureaucratic-activist complex" worked to sabotage (now former) Cabinet members such as EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Pruitt became a target, in part, because he had "moved to redefine the Waters of the United States rule" that was allowing the EPA to "regulate ponds and potholes," as she wrote in her chapter entitled "'Deep State'



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Revolt.” As for Zinke, “Resisters engineered at least 15 investigations” against him — to include “whether (no joke) his wife could ride with him in government vehicles,” recounts Strassel.

Such “resistance” personnel feed media allies stories such as cited earlier about water regulations. The EPA’s unwarranted fretting about “potholes” during the Obama administration is not hyperbole. When the Trump administration announced it was repealing the Obama-era WOTUS (“Waters of the U.S.”) rule and its expansion of the Clean Water Act’s mandate, which was supposed to protect “navigable waters,” there were roars of ovations in the real world. R.J. Smith, a fellow at CEI’s Center of Energy and Environment, put it this way:

The usurpation of power over state regulatory authority and private property rights has led to major regulatory nightmares all across the country. In order to conduct the most elementary of necessary land-use actions, farmers, ranchers, developers, home builders, businesses, and private landowners have to run a gauntlet of lengthy, costly, and uncertain regulatory demands to receive a permit or otherwise face enormous fines and penalties. Thus, endlessly delaying necessary activities and raising costs substantially, with zero compensation for the taking of private property.

Smith also urged the Congress to revisit the Clean Water Act and amend that act “to state clearly and unambiguously that ‘navigable waters’ means ‘navigable.’ This means for commercial ships, tugboats, and barges, instead of the WOTUS definition that expanded to nearly everything but rubber duckies. Creeks, streams, and run-off ditches or sewers that fill up during a rainstorm are not ‘navigable waters.’”

The major, green-leaning newspapers, after much trashing of the administration, on occasion give a bit of pro-forma space for the other side. Thus, if you trudge through to the end of the *Los Angeles Times* piece cited above, you find a short comment by Caren Cowan, executive director of the New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association, which represents about 1,400 ranchers. Sadly (from the paper’s viewpoint), Cowan sees “applying regulations to ephemeral streams” as “costly” with “little environmental benefit” and “written by Washington bureaucrats who didn’t understand the Southwest.”

The Trump administration — so unenlightened that it respects the roles of state and local governments — maintains that its proposed move would “limit where federal regulations apply and would give states and tribes more flexibility to determine how best to manage waters within their borders.”

The *Los Angeles Times* disagrees, arguing: “Few if any state environmental agencies and tribal governments” have “the money, expertise and legal authority to replace federal regulation.” The Left’s answer is to force taxpayers throughout the country to fork up their money to regulate New Mexico’s “ephemeral” waters.

Speaking about slanted press coverage, here’s another example: If you go down — very deep — into the *New York Times* above-cited treatise claiming that Trump is against science, you will find (on paragraph 56) a passing mention acknowledging that “past administrations have, to varying degrees, disregarded scientific findings that conflicted [with] their priorities.” Even the sainted Barack is said to have done so — once in 2011. “But” (and you know that word was coming) “in the Trump administration, the scope is wider,” concluded the “paper of record.”

Actually, there is some truth to that — though not in the way the *New York Times* means it. The Trump administration has committed to “balancing the benefits *and* costs of regulating when they create new federal policies,” as has been noted by James Broughel, a senior research fellow with the Mercatus



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Center at George Mason University. (Emphasis added.) That would be novel.

In contrast, there are Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, and the other Democratic candidates seeking the White House — who in general have made a fetish about their opposition to fossil fuels because of supposed catastrophic climate change. Biden, the former vice president and Democratic frontrunner, says he “believes” in the “Green New Deal,” calling it “a crucial framework for meeting the climate challenges.” (He leaves out some details: Its cost has been estimated variously, including a study that pegs it up to \$93 trillion over a decade, or about \$600,000 per household.)

Buttigieg, another leading Democratic candidate who is often called a “moderate” by the Left, maintains (on his website): “Climate catastrophe is on the horizon.” The former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, wants us to know that “experts tell us we have 10 years to get on the right path, or global warming will reach catastrophic levels by 2050.” He also contends that Washington hasn’t been doing enough and that we need to impose severe restrictions. He adds: “The timeline that compels us to act isn’t set by Congress — it’s being dictated by science.”

However, there are real scientists (less publicized of course) who are warning against exaggerating the potential threat of climate change. Among these are Dr. Judith Curry, an American climatologist who formerly chaired the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology. In a recent blog she called “doomsters” their own worst enemies. Moreover, Curry said:

We have been told that the science of climate change is “settled.” However, in climate science there has been a tension between the drive towards a scientific “consensus” to support policy making, versus exploratory research that pushes forward the knowledge frontier. Climate science is characterized by a rapidly evolving knowledge base and disagreement among experts. Predictions of 21st century climate change are characterized by deep uncertainty.

Curry also says that wild claims are “triggering a global backlash against doing anything sensible.” And, as she pointed out, “Exaggerating the dangers beyond credibility makes it difficult to take climate change seriously.”

Here’s what most eco-candidates ignore: According to 2018 data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, more than 63 percent of electricity generation in this country is from fossil fuels (coal, natural gas, petroleum, and other gases). About 20 percent comes from clean, safe, and environmentally friendly nuclear energy (which left-wingers generally reject). A bit less than 17 percent comes from renewable energy sources.

Also discounted is the fact that fossil fuels are found in 96 percent of the items we use each day, as highlighted by the International Association of Geophysical Contractors. Just remember that you can give facts to most politicians and they can draw their own confusions.

— William P. Hoar

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