

Commentary: 10,000 experts plan to make America 'evidence-based' again

OPINION By Robert Weiner and Kyle Fleck - Special to the American-Statesman



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Protesters residents gather on the south steps of the Capitol to raise awareness of climate change in 2016.

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Ten thousand of the nation's leading scientists are gathering in Austin this week to discuss the state of science in the country. High on the list of concerns for the American Association for the Advancement of Science at their annual meeting is the Trump administration's antagonism to language used widely in the

scientific community: “science-based” and “evidence-based.” Apparently, these words are so anathema that the current administration has banned CDC from using them on its websites and in agency directives.

When we informed the association that we were working on a piece regarding the bans on these terms, the organization’s press office offered a had a single word reply: “Yeah!” Susan Hockfield, the association’s new president, has said that “working together to clearly articulate the value and importance of scientific research and innovation is more than ever the imperative.”

TONI INGLIS: The CDC can’t use 7 terms on paper. Here’s what to expect.

Those in attendance will include: former Vice President Joe Biden, who will speak Sunday evening on advancements in cancer research; NASA Houston Johnson Space Center expert Kimberly Hambuchen, who will talk about NASA’s Bipedal Humanoid Caretaker Robot; and researchers like Dr. Patricia Berg of George Washington University, an AAAS fellow who discovered a protein activated in 80 percent of breast cancers and 70 percent of prostate cancers.

It makes a sort of twisted sense that an administration that came out of the gate touting their use of “alternative facts” regarding the crowd size at President Trump’s inauguration is now engaging in hostility against scientifically provable, objective reality. A clear pattern has emerged: “Evidence-based” and “science-based” facts are of no use to Trump or his agency heads.

The upcoming conference has several panels regarding issues such as “What Citizens Think About Science: Survey Data and Implications for Communicators,” “Understanding and Responding to Climate Change Denial,” and “Facts and Value in Public Policymaking.” It’s clear these scientists recognize the importance of communicating objective facts to the public. The thrust of the conference can be seen as an implicit rebuke to the current administration’s hostility to science.

Some alarming changes went into effect at the Center for Disease Control in December. In addition to “evidence-based” and “science-based”, senior staff

was briefed on still more language that is “forbidden” for budget documents. They include medical terms like “fetus” and “transgender.”

HOW WE GOT HERE: CDC given list of ‘forbidden’ words for budget.

The Department of Health and Human Services has introduced language that demonstrates a shift from science and toward ideology as well. The EPA, Department of Energy, and Department of Transportation have seen language about climate change removed. The head of the EPA, Scott Pruitt, personally led removal of wording emphasizing human activity’s role in climate change, according to e-mails discovered by the Environment Defense Fund last month.

Apparently, the planet must just suffer through incredibly destructive droughts and wildfires in equatorial regions, staggering glacial melt at the poles, an increasing number of disruptive weather events such as last year’s hurricanes, and levels of carbon dioxide that contributed to making the five hottest years on record on earth occur since 2010, which in turn causes oceans to rise and crops to falter. Nonetheless, “climate change” has all but disappeared from the United States’ official view.

When medical language is prohibited in health agency documents, it detracts from the ability to care for people. When the United States is the only country in the world to pull out of the Paris Accord and our national agencies are instructed to turn their backs on evidence, it can only put America further behind. Far from making America great again, it puts us on a purposeful backslide in international relevance.

“Evidence” and “science” are not dirty words, despite the administration’s ban.

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