



Photo: Joe Brusky

Standing Up for Science

The “war on science” you hear people talking about? It’s real, and we’re already seeing its results.

by Emily Marquez

The numbers tell the story well. The Trump administration has filled only 20 of 83 top scientific posts as of the end of 2017, far fewer than the Obama or G.W. Bush administrations at the same point (63 and 51, respectively).

Meanwhile, scientific advisory panels have been sidelined. According to a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), advisory committees at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Energy and Department of the Interior met less often in 2017 than at any time since 1997—which is when the government began tracking these meetings.

Then there’s EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt who apparently doesn’t want the agency to have any regulatory authority at all and has repeatedly ignored recommendations of his own scientists. Pruitt recently banned advisors who receive any EPA grants from serving on scientific advisory boards. Industry scientists have always served on these panels but, with this change, the balance will be shifted towards an even stronger industry presence.

I’m of the opinion that advisory committees heavy with industry scientists are not a good idea. Without input from independent researchers on the leading edge of science, policymakers are less equipped to make informed decisions—and it’s easier for industry lobbyists to get their way.

Scientists under attack

Individual scientists and scientific agencies are under attack as well. Last month, Representative Lamar Smith (R-Texas), the chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology called for an investigation of the director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Dr. Linda Birnbaum. Why? Because she had co-authored an editorial discussing barriers to health-protective policy that reached this conclusion:

Closing the gap between evidence and policy will require that engaged citizens, both scientists and non-scientists, work to ensure our government officials pass health-protective policies based on the best available scientific evidence.

Representative Smith is concerned—and wants Dr. Birnbaum investigated—because she may be “encourag[ing] citizens to petition government officials,” and thus lobbying. Excuse me?

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Bringing Native Voices to the Farm Bill

Roughly every five years, Congress passes a multi-billion-dollar set of policies that underpin the U.S. food and farming system. The Farm Bill—which we believe should actually be called the “Food and Farm Bill”—sets policies for agriculture, food production, natural resource conservation and rural development. It also governs nutrition and food assistance programs.

As the legislation moves forward in 2018, a new umbrella organization is advocating for Native American interests in the process: The Native Farm Bill Coalition. Here’s how the Coalition describes why it formed:

Indian Country faces some of the worst health disparities of any population group in the nation, and Native communities have the highest rate of reliance on federal feeding programs. Native producers, who represent the key to tribal food sovereignty and self-reliance, face major regulatory and financial obstacles.

It is crucial for all of Indian Country and its allies to be at the table and help shape the future of the Farm Bill—tribes, intertribal groups, Native organizations serving urban and rural populations alike, and others.

The Coalition notes that Native American interests have been pushed to the margins of Farm Bill discussions for decades, despite the fact that agriculture is a major activity on tribal lands, providing more than \$3.4 billion in income every year. This production, however, is more than 99 percent raw commodities; the Coalition is pressing for Farm Bill policies that support a shift to production of healthy, local, economically beneficial and nutritious food needed in Native American communities and rural areas.

PAN actively supports the newly formed Native Farm Bill Coalition and will act to amplify their message and advocate for their recommendations throughout the Farm Bill process. We recognize that agriculture in the U.S. is founded on the theft of Native land and that, even today, Native American, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native communities face barriers of access to land, seed, capital, information, water and other agricultural inputs necessary for farming and ranching.

Specifically, we support the Coalition’s proposed “set-asides” for Indigenous peoples within every title of the Farm Bill, articulated in a reparations framework. We also support the call for “638 authority,” a provision that would assure tribal governments a measure of self-determination in implementing agricultural programs, and direct federal agencies to deal directly with tribes on a government-to-government basis—as is the law of the land.

We believe a strong Native voice in the Food and Farm Bill will move us closer to PAN’s vision of a just and viable food and farming system for all.

The Native Farm Bill Coalition is a joint project of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community’s Seeds of Native Health campaign, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the National Congress of American Indians, and the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative. See www.seedsofnativehealth.org for more details.



Native American interests have been pushed to the margins of Farm Bill discussions for decades, despite the fact that agriculture is a major activity on tribal lands. Photo courtesy of Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative

Meet PAN Board Member Kyle Powys Whyte

Kyle Powys Whyte holds the Timnick Chair in the Humanities at Michigan State University. He is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Community Sustainability and a member of the Potawatomi Nation. PAN's Executive Director Kristin Schafer recently chatted with Kyle about Indigenous food sovereignty and how PAN's work intersects with his own.

What brings you to PAN's board?

I'm primarily a scholar and activist working on climate justice and environmental justice. But, since I work mostly with Indigenous peoples, these issues are almost always related to food. Indigenous peoples who are concerned with climate change are most often concerned with the food system and the harms of industrial agriculture.

How does industrial agriculture impact Indigenous peoples?

Historically, industrial agriculture wouldn't have been possible without the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their homelands. Then the environment was transformed by deforestation and terraforming of the land. The U.S. very deliberately tried to force Indigenous peoples to be farmers of a particular type, and that was never quite successful. While, for many tribes, it's not possible to return to traditional food practices, it is possible to get involved with organic, small-scale farming that supports local food systems.

Is there a role for U.S. policies in supporting Indigenous food sovereignty and equity in the food system?

Absolutely. One of the things Native people have been involved in is the Native Farm Bill—I know PAN submitted a letter of support for that Farm Bill and the coalition. For a lot of people in the U.S., it's important to realize that Native peoples are a key ally in the struggle to overcome the wrongs



and harms of industrial agriculture. We want to find ways to work together to promote farming that not only supports our communities and land, but is healthy and sustainable for all.

How can non-Indigenous people support the work to restore food sovereignty for Native communities?

In the wake of U.S. colonialism, Indigenous people were not the only ones dispossessed of land. Other groups were as well, including African Americans, Latinx—even many white people have lost land to corporate entities. The challenge is not only getting land back, but re-learning how to steward the land in a healthy way. Some focus on sovereignty as “control” of food; Indigenous peoples see food sovereignty as having a proper ethical relationship to food.

What is your ideal vision of a just, healthy food system?

We need a food system we are motivated to take care of because we have a moral relationship to our food. If this were the primary way we related to food, we wouldn't have seen the rise of industrial agriculture. That's an ideal we need to strive for. Though PAN's work may be focused on science or policy, organizations like PAN play an essential role in building awareness that food is spiritual, and central to identity and culture.

You can find a full version of this interview on PAN's blog at www.panna.org/kyle-interview.

ABOUT PAN PAN works to create a just, thriving food system, working with those on the frontlines to tackle the pesticide problem—and reclaim the future of food and farming. One of five regional centers worldwide, PAN North America links local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. Together, we challenge the global proliferation of pesticides, defend basic rights to health and environmental quality, and work to ensure the transition to a just and viable food system.

Sustain PAN's Work—Give Monthly

When you join PAN as a Sustainer, you become part of a vital group that donates each month to fund grassroots science, collaboration with frontline communities and policy change.

We rely on consistent support from Sustainers to work towards a healthy, fair and resilient system of food and farming.

Become a Sustainer today by going to www.panna.org/give-monthly.



Representative Smith also recently conducted a committee hearing on the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in a clear attempt to discredit and defund the scientific agency.

IARC has become a target for Representative Smith since the agency's 2015 determination that the herbicide glyphosate was a probable carcinogen. As is clearly shown in a recently released legal document, Monsanto—the maker of glyphosate-based RoundUp—had a hand in orchestrating these attacks on IARC.

Keep on trackin'


Public access to scientific information is being undermined too. The new Environmental Data Governance Initiative (EDGI) has been relentlessly tracking changes in agency web content under this administration. In one recent report, EDGI found that several agencies removed or significantly reduced the prominence of climate change web content and explanations of the environmental harms of fossil fuels.

These changes are limiting the public's access to information, much of which is information from taxpayer-funded research on science or policy.

It wasn't all roses before the Trump administration. Anti-science bills have been introduced and re-introduced over the years, and Dr. Birnbaum was attacked by the House Science Committee back in 2013 over comments she wrote about endocrine-disrupting compounds. But, in the current climate, I'm very glad we have groups like EDGI and UCS watchdogging these issues.

Will science survive?

One good thing about the large number of PhDs in science is that there are just *a lot* of scientists—people who have been trained to think critically and who, much of the time, are very good at it.

Sure, science will survive. But it shouldn't merely survive, it should thrive. And it should be helping us make smart policy decisions too. —



PAN scientists Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, Emily Marquez and Margaret Reeves are pushing back against the war on science. They conduct air monitoring for pesticide drift with frontline community members, speak up about pro-GE myths being presented as facts, and disseminate independent researchers' work in hard-hitting blogs and reports.

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