

Hundreds of thousands to participate in worldwide “March for Science”

By Bryan Dyne
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Hundreds of thousands of scientists, researchers, workers and youth are poised to participate in today’s “March for Science.” The main rally will take place in Washington, DC, with sister demonstrations and marches taking place in more than 600 locations across the world, involving people in at least 130 countries and encompassing six continents. It is slated to be the world’s largest pro-science demonstration to date.

The initial impulse for the march arose when the Trump administration deleted all references to climate change from the official White House web site minutes after Trump’s inauguration. Scientists across the United States saw this as the opening salvo in a much broader attack on science generally, leading to the creation of the March for Science Facebook group calling for a demonstration in Washington, DC, mirroring the protests against the Trump administration before, during and in the weeks following Trump’s first days as president.

More broadly, the March for Science reflects the general anti-Trump sentiment in the majority of the US and world’s population. The fact that the Facebook group has attracted more than 830,000 members shows just how many people, both scientists and non-scientists from all corners of the globe, are seeking an avenue to oppose the Trump administration and its reactionary policies.

One measure of this is the fact that the march has been endorsed by virtually every US organization with an orientation towards science and several international scientific institutions, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, The Planetary Society, the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. The notable exceptions are endorsements from the official scientific agencies of various governments, such as ESA or

NASA, though no doubt individuals from these organizations support and will be participating in the marches.

The event is being led by three honorary co-chairs, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, Bill Nye “the Science Guy” and Dr. Lydia Villa-Komaroff, all of whom have been involved on some level as advocates for science in the political arena. Dr. Hanna-Attisha fought to expose lead poisoning in Flint, Bill Nye has repeatedly spoken out against climate change deniers and Dr. Villa-Komaroff pioneered the field of biotechnology.

Despite this, however, and despite the anti-Trump origins of the March for Science, the organizers have taken great pains to avoid any discussions of the anti-science policies of various Trump administration officials, from EPA administrator Scott Pruitt, to Secretary of Energy Rick Perry to Trump himself. No mention has been made of the policies that allow for the destruction of the environment, attacks on public education or various forms of censorship that scientists in the US and internationally often face, much less the increasing danger of nuclear war and the existential threat that this poses to all life on Earth.

These limitations are summed up in the declaration that attacks on science “are not a partisan issue.” While the mission statement for the March for Science correctly notes that science has been attacked by both Republicans and Democrats, it does not fully explain the inherently political nature of this question.

This is particularly striking when one considers that one of the three honorary co-chairs for the event is Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, director of the Flint Hurley Medical Center’s pediatric residency program, and the person who first revealed the doubling and tripling of lead in the blood of Flint children since April 2014. The science behind lead poisoning has been understood

for decades, particularly the potentially deadly effect it has, especially on children.

This has become an intensely political issue for the residents of Flint, who are outraged over the fact that this problem was known to city and state officials but ignored by state appointed Emergency Manager Darnell Earley to slash city operating costs in order to pay city debts to Wall Street banks. Dr. Hanna-Attisha herself was attacked by city and state officials for tampering with the data even as residents were becoming ill and dying.

The forces that suppressed the lead poisoning data in Flint can trace their political heritage to those that have denied the dangers of nuclear winter for nearly four decades, those that attacked the theory of evolution during the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, and even as far back as the reactionary methods used to suppress Copernicus' idea that the Earth revolves around the Sun. In every one of these cases, the scientists threatened material and political interests and were forcefully attacked.

The challenge for those participating in today's march is not merely the "celebration of science," but of connecting the attacks on science to the broader attacks on all progressive aspects of modern society by capitalism, a social and economic system in which all human activity is subordinated to the profit motive. As such, scientists and their supporters must connect the defense of science to the struggle of the most progressive social force in society, the working class, against the corporate elite.

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