

# COMMENTARY

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### Neglecting science will have long-term implications in US

**Your Turn**  
 Philip A. Chan, MD  
 Guest columnist

Science is one of the foundations of modern society. The impact of science in our society is ubiquitous ranging from health to technology to how we understand and view the world. Throughout history, science has been a driving force behind human advancement.

One of the most important areas where science has made an impact is medicine and health. Scientific discoveries have included vaccines, antibiotics, and treatments that have saved countless lives. Before antibiotics, people often died from infections we now consider mild. Women commonly died during childbirth. Infections like smallpox and measles ravaged the population before vaccines. Science has revolutionized health and continues to foster new innovations like treatments for cancer and other health conditions.

As a physician, I believe that one of the greatest threats to our society is the rise of misinformation. Misinformation is defined as false or inaccurate information, especially that which is deliberately intended to deceive. What is concerning is that many reliable sources of information are being labeled as misinformation, creating an environment where people don't know what to believe. This leads to the inevitable rise of falsehoods and undermines science and some of the fundamental principles of our society.

What do we do if we can't identify facts when we see them? How should physicians practice medicine? Should we be basing our health care on a political or religious ideology? Do you want your physician making decisions about your clinical care based on what they read last night on social media or on what's been demonstrated to be scientifically effective? Regardless of a political ideology, science must maintain its neutrality. As a society, we must strive to focus on understanding the science and the evidence in order to continue to improve the health and well-being of our society.

Importantly, we need to continue to invest in institutions which promote science and health. This includes the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Founded in 1887, the NIH is composed of multiple institutes and centers with the goal of facilitating and funding medical research in the United States. Investment in the NIH and research in general has made the United States a world leader in health and science. People come to the United States from all over the world to learn and American scientists and physicians have been considered some of the best in the world.

The NIH includes institutes dedicated to areas including cancer, chronic diseases, infectious diseases, mental health, and neuroscience. Many of the greatest advancements in modern medicine can be traced back to NIH-supported studies. This includes cancer treatments, vaccines, and treatments for heart disease, strokes, and brain conditions. Importantly, the NIH also trains the next gen-



People who oppose the Trump administration's move to restrict transgender rights protest in front of the Stonewall Inn and the Stonewall National Monument in New York City on Feb. 14. DAVID "DEE" DELGADO/REUTERS

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

##### Transgender people have long been part of humanity

Mark Patinkin tells us of some readers' criticism for his support of President Trump banning transgender (biological male) athletes from competing in women's sports (News, Feb. 21).

NCAA President Charlie Baker told a U.S. Senate committee that he knew of fewer than 10 transgender athletes competing – this out of more than 500,000 students in college interscholastic sports.

I believe many of Trump's political actions are only to legitimize and encourage bigotry. Transgender and non-binary citizens have long been part of humanity. During the "Great Religious Awakening" in the 18th century in Cumberland, a famous itinerant preacher who went by the name "Public Universal Friend" and later identified as neither male nor female, led a growing Christian movement that became the "Society of Universal Friends."

Many elite athletes are well represented by women who are lesbians. Do we hear heterosexual teammates scream "Kick the gays out"? No, teammates and fans want the most talented athletes.

Many people have trouble placing transgender persons into their personal world view. I myself recall a sweet-natured, somewhat flamboyant, young boy from my 1960s childhood in the deep South. We attended the same Southern Methodist Sunday school class and both participated in award-winning junior and senior high school marching and concert bands.

Over 6 years I observed he was at times called out by others, including our gay band director, fellow students, and by some members of my hometown's underground gay community. He eventually transitioned, had hormone and surgical intervention and lived out her life as a nightclub manager until her death.

I regret I did not befriend this kind neighbor, but conservative peer pressure and my lack of maturity

kept me in the hypocrisy closet.  
*Walter Thorne, Providence*

##### Western RI deserves better strategy to stay warm

Rhode Island Energy recently presented its "Gas Operations 101" to stakeholders studying "the future of gas." Our natural gas system dates to the mid 19th century. Before there was electricity, it served lighting needs. Back then, our small population was mostly on the coast, so gas interests installed few pipelines in the east. Now we use gas for heat, but western Rhode Island still is not served piped gas – it heats with "delivered fuels" (oil, propane) or electric resistance systems.

Heating with oil, propane or electric resistance systems is expensive. Our energy plans call for better service to western Rhode Island, but that has yet to be delivered. As we weigh "the future of gas," the gas regulators question whether they are authorized to plan and provide for those adversely reliant on delivered fuels.

Even those with gas service sometimes rely on liquefied natural gas shipped to storage terminals on our coast. In January 2019, a gas shortage stopped service to 7,500 gas customers on Aquidneck Island. Regulators recently approved a proposal to install portable liquefied natural gas vaporization equipment in Portsmouth to shore up gas supplies. But with that approval, the Board required Rhode Island Energy to reduce Aquidneck Island's reliance on natural gas using conservation strategies and alternative heating sources like electric air source heat pumps.

All citizens deserve coordinated and facilitated access to our best sources of energy. We need a thermal energy transition plan for the whole state. When that plan is done at scale, new thermal energy systems will bring savings, a more secure supply, and better heat.

*Seth Handy, Providence*

## Safe injection sites a bad public policy

**Your Turn**

seek to make this program permanent by removing the