

'March for Science' Organizers Just Love Science. So Do 2nd Graders



By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 14, 2017



Unicorns love science, too! (Credit: Shutterstock) ^[1]

At the end of my senior year in high school, our class opened a time capsule that we made in 2nd grade. Each of us had filled out a piece of paper asking us questions like, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I wrote "Scientist."

Of course, in 2nd grade, I didn't have a lot of insight into what scientists actually did. (In fact, I didn't truly appreciate it until graduate school.) I thought science was cool. I owned a chemistry set. Whatever science was, I wanted more of it.

Oddly, the website for the "March for Science," which was organized by scientists, reads a lot like what I wrote in 2nd grade. After weeks of planning, the site's page on [Principles and Goals](#) ^[2] continues to be filled with trite platitudes and clichés. The group's science education policy? To teach people to "think critically." A policy to advance careers in science? They "should be an option for anyone." Science funding? They want more of it.

Believe it or not, this is actually a substantial improvement. The [first iteration of the website](#) ^[3] was primarily concerned with diversity and poking fun at conservatives.

Never Miss an Opportunity

The co-founders of the march have had many high-profile opportunities to thoughtfully elaborate upon their mission. But, as the saying goes, they have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

Consider co-founder Valerie Aquino's recent appearance on CBC Radio's *The Current*. (I was also

interviewed.) The host asked what the message of the march is. Her [response](#) [4] was, "We're championing good science and application." She never got more specific than that.

It appears as if being elusive is a strategy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an [interview](#) [5] with co-founder Caroline Weinberg. She was asked to list specific policies she wanted to see implemented. Her answer included "better funding of scientific topics" and "to encourage a completely bipartisan acceptance of the fact that scientific evidence is more important than personal bias."

The [federal government spent about \\$131 billion on R&D in 2016](#) [6]. How much more money does Dr. Weinberg want? How should it be paid for? Higher taxes? Cuts to other programs? It's highly doubtful any of this has been thought through. Though she refused to give any specific answers, we were admonished that it's "time for everyone to get on board."

All Aboard the Science Train!

Okay, sure. I'll get on board, pending satisfactory answers to the following serious policy questions:

- 1) Should vaccines be mandatory? Which ones?
- 2) Should GMOs be required to undergo safety testing beyond that of conventional foods? Should they be labeled?
- 3) How should we resolve the opioid addiction epidemic?
- 4) Should we build more nuclear power plants? Where should we put current and future nuclear waste?
- 5) In terms of chemical and environmental safety, what is the best way to measure risk? What role should the EPA have in making policy? Should its authority be subject to review?
- 6) Should fracking be allowed? If so, how should it be regulated?
- 7) Should e-cigarettes be available to anybody who wants them, or should they be restricted in some way? If so, what sort of restrictions should be in place?
- 8) Should the FDA ease regulations on new drug approvals?
- 9) What should be America's short-, medium-, and long-term goals in space?
- 10) Should the CDC's mission refocus on its core competency, i.e., prevention of infectious disease?
- 11) What's the best way to prevent climate change? Nuclear power? Wind and solar? What policies would steer America toward a carbon-free future?

These are just a handful of the science policy questions I would like to see addressed. Pleading for more evidence-based policy means absolutely nothing when the march organizers won't tell us what those policies are.

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Links

[1] <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/unicorn-rainbow-vectorillustration-467852756>

[2] <https://www.marchforscience.com/mission-and-vision/>

[3] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2017/01/26/dont-let-partisans-hijack-science-march-10777>

[4] <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-february-14-2017-1.3981592/february-14-2017-full-episode-transcript-1.3982656#segment3>

[5] <http://www.chronicle.com/article/March-for-Science-/239160>

[6] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/11/08/whoever-wins-election-day-2016-american-science-still-1-world-10415>