Answering Nature's Call, New York Times Gets Hurt Feelings, And More Media Appearances

By Hank Campbell — March 13, 2017

1. *Nature* magazine covered our ranking of the good and bad science journalism sites last week [1], highlighting our concern that "Not only is it susceptible to the same sorts of biases that afflict regular journalism, but it is uniquely vulnerable to outrageous sensationalism".

RealClearScience was even more blunt [2]. “Much of science reporting is a morass of ideologically driven junk science, hyped research, or thick, technical jargon that almost no one can understand”.

2. The *New York Times* was apoplectic about their standing, with their writers reminding us on Twitter that, in the past, the *New York Times* has won Pulitzers for science coverage. Well, that is true, but *New York Times* science coverage also endorsed eugenics and gushed about how pro-science Hitler was, so you can't use the past as a crutch unless you want to be reminded there were lots of other periods when it was not so great. Like now.

The irony: A day after complaining about how much better they ranked than a panel of experts said, their print edition contained a piece about a tiny study of people with weak pain who were helped by acupuncture [3] - but it was validated by exceptionally weak fMRI techniques that are dismissed by legitimate science.
Call the Pulitzer committee, they spent money on ink, paper and union labor to endorse alternative medicine that has never been shown to work in double-blind clinical trials. You know, like actual medicine does.

3. Other sites that ranked poorly, because they often framed science through their social justice beliefs, objected to the notion of a panel at all. Dr. Alex Berezow, one of the panelists, then showed them how self-serving it was to attack expertise that way. Because one of critics of the panel, Dan Fagin, who dutifully retweeted anti-GMO, anti-vaccine, anti-energy activists, not only has a Pulitzer but is a Pulitzer judge.

Here are the criteria he was just fine with when it landed him a prize [4]. Identical.

What are the criteria for the judging of The Pulitzer Prizes? There are no set criteria for the judging of the Prizes. The definitions of each category are the only guidelines. It is left up to the Nominating Juries and The Pulitzer Prize Board to determine exactly what makes a work "distinguished."

But when he is defending the corporations who pay him, he suddenly claims that same methodology is suspect. Let's see, he publishes in the places that were criticized for framing science through their political agendas and his work exactly matches the beliefs of the anti-science groups who only accept science that promotes doomsday prophecies - he is against GMOs and energy and insists trace chemicals can kill us. And we are supposed to believe it's a coincidence.
they are all spontaneously complaining about a ranking on the same chart they are hand-wringing about while insisting it’s illegitimate because they weren’t on the panel.

4. The hard-left blogging site Scienceblogs.com really, really did not like where they landed on the science media credibility matrix. So they proved why they don’t belong on a chart with BBC and New York Times at all. If I had been invited on the panel, you can bet I would have shown the editors 12 years of their conspiracy speculation and shrill partisan history as evidence and gotten them removed.

One of their bloggers, Mark Hoofnagle, goes off into tinfoil hat land about corporations and Republicans, but he is so baffled by a lack of any evidence for any of his claims about us, except Mother Jones said mean things one time, that he resorts to making it a big deal that I gave Pres. Trump’s early science and health picks a reasonable examination. To them, if you are not anti-Republican, it means you must secretly be right-wing fifth columnists invading the wholesome progressive confines of science media.
On to more important matters, what is the deal with the ACSH anyway? It seems to be a very contradictory organization. They seem to have lots of legitimate scientific content, a staff with legitimate credentials, and a list of distinguished policy advisors, as well as good articles on anti-vax, ag, alti-med etc. The American Council on Science and Health, is not just astroturf, but may be one of the best astroturf investments out there for those interested in advancing their industry message. Why is this? Because they are really good at using legitimate science reporting and advocacy to camouflage a freemarket fundamentalist product. While railing against politicization of science, they happily submit deeply political material as some kind of nonideological exercise in scientific expertise. Take their review of Trump's nominees for cabinet positions with a scientific mission, in an article entitled Evaluating President Trump's Science and Health Choices guess what? There were no bad choices.

There is nothing contradictory, to the American public. We have scientists and doctors who do science and medicine while he and his fellow bloggers use science as a veil to bleat about their political agenda and only link to other political partisans in their echo chamber. Knowing that, of course real science media will puzzle him. The worst part is how sloppy he is. I get he is a blogger so perhaps thinks he can't be bothered to do any research, but he can't even get Dr. Berezow's name correct much less show evidence for his science media equivalent of being an Obama birther - his belief that we are "advancing" an "industry message" for no one he can name. Which also makes it no surprise he conveniently never bothered to do even the basics of scholarship and learn I publicly admitted I did not vote for Trump, and I was critical of him in both USA Today and the Wall Street Journal. On a site populated by juveniles he takes it to another level. Because he can't be bothered to do more than free-think for fellow bloggers he believes I must be a bad guy because I think poor people should keep more of their money. Let poor people pay less taxes? Oh, the humanity.

We're in our seventh administration while the entire clown car at Scienceblogs has only ever accepted one President as legitimate. The site was created by a rich, partisan magazine owner as a marketing arm to promote his war on President George W. Bush, and most of their writers were chosen either to advance that ideological agenda or give it a scientific beard. The plain fact is, sometimes Presidents want evidence-based help and sometimes they don't. We're here to give the public and officials the science and then they can accept it or not. The President's science and health picks have been quite good and we just got more evidence of that with Dr. Scott Gottlieb running FDA. We may be critical based on actions that come later, but for right now they have promised reforms that need to be made.

Sorry if bloggers who have never and will never vote for a Republican anyway need to frame that any other way, but that is why we write about science and health for America and they whine about us.

5. In more evidence-based thinking, the Baltimore Sun had Drs. Bloom and Berezow team up to debunk claims that your wi-fi signal is giving you - or littler versions of you - cancer.

No, really, that's a thing. One coast is claiming it about cell phones and one is claiming it about Wi-Fi. If we eliminated the coasts, America would be a Science Utopia. But we can't so we instead have to try and educate them on physics, biology and toxicology. No one does it better than those
two.

Seriously, give it a read [6] and rest easy knowing that it's safe to check your email again.

6. It's no secret that the EPA has been a little out of control for the last few years. Even I, who have solidly defended their work in the past, had to watch in horror as they began to legislate from their unelected offices, attending elaborate parties thrown by environmental groups, creating job titles to give them to friends in environmental groups, copying and pasting rules written by them, and pre-negotiating settlements with them that stick taxpayers with expensive costs that help no one [7].

It hasn't been this bad since their earliest days, when scientists cleared the pesticide DDT when it came to causing human or environmental harm and William Ruckelshaus, the first EPA head, banned it anyway. He later admitted it was the EPA's first foray into politicization of science. It wouldn't be their last and he is back in the news talking about Pruitt and his efforts to reform the organization.

Every time a new vector-borne disease threatens Americans, those in the know ask the obvious question; why does our EPA write the documents that show other countries how to spray DDT inside homes but keeps it banned here? It's not science. In The Daily Caller, Chris White discusses our previous work on DDT and asks an obvious question [8]: Given his history, why should anyone listen to Ruckelshaus on Pruitt or Trump?

7. The great thing about being science and health consumer advocates is you never know who's reading. A site called Thecoli (no idea what it means) talked about how millennials are not getting busy the way their forefathers (and mothers) did.

They talk about the results [9] and such but their conclusion is what made me chuckle:

8. Should we open a Croatian Council on Science and Health? Compared to politically-driven Pulitzer Prize winners and Harvard activists, Croatia is a scientific wonderland. They loved our chart for the reason most of the world did; it was accurate and called out the science media that are the problem, in a way that American corporate journalists, who are all flying the same flag or afraid to admit otherwise, lest they get emails and phone calls demanding they be fired, cannot.

But readers at the #4 most popular site in Croatia and top 3,000 in the world loved it [10]. And have you been to Croatia? It's breathtakingly beautiful and the people are terrific. Every time there is a Euro Cup, I wear my Croatia jersey, because a friend of mine brought one back from a trip home, unsolicited. That's how great those people are. That they love science is even better.