

February 4, 2015

Good Power Line short on President Imperious.

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Seth Mandel posts on the budget.

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Michael Barone has budget thoughts too.

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The Keynesian predictions have proven unfounded. The 2009 stimulus, much of it devoted to preserving public employee union jobs, didn't seem to stimulate much. Growth after the tough early 2014 winter, though still not dazzling, has been stronger than in pre-sequester years. Unemployment fell sharply as an end of benefits prompted workers to find jobs and employers to hire them.

Obama will argue for more spending on the grounds that the federal budget deficit is now sharply down. It is: The Congressional Budget Office says it declined from 10 percent of gross domestic product in his first year in office — blame George W. Bush and the financial crisis is you like — to around the 50-year average of 2.7 percent.

The sequester contributed to that by holding down spending. But credit also goes to the fact that our tax system is much more progressive than you'd gather from Obama's rhetoric. CBO reports that the top 20 percent of earners pay 70 percent of all federal taxes, and the top 1 percent pay 24 percent. ...

The Editors of USA Today are not impressed with the budget either.

Much of the controversy over the \$4 trillion budget President Obama released Monday has focused on what it would do: hike taxes on corporations and the wealthy, cut taxes for the middle class and spend more on infrastructure.

But more important is what the spending plan would not do. It wouldn't deal with the government's long-term financial woes, driven largely by the soaring costs of benefit programs.

Sure, the president's projected deficits for the next few years would dip below \$500 billion, after topping \$1 trillion during his first four years. But with 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day, it's delusional to view deficit control as mission accomplished. The Congressional Budget Office, which projects further out than the White House, predicts annual deficits back over \$1 trillion in 10 years. ...

Bjørn Lomborg, has a WSJ OpEd on climate alarmism.

It is an indisputable fact that carbon emissions are rising—and faster than most scientists predicted. But many climate-change alarmists seem to claim that all climate change is worse than expected. This ignores that much of the data are actually encouraging. The latest study from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that in the previous 15 years temperatures had risen 0.09 degrees Fahrenheit. The average of all models expected 0.8 degrees. So we're seeing about 90% less temperature rise than expected.

Facts like this are important because a one-sided focus on worst-case stories is a poor foundation for sound policies. Yes, Arctic sea ice is melting faster than the models expected. But models also predicted that Antarctic sea ice would decrease, yet it is increasing. Yes, sea levels are rising, but the rise is not accelerating—if anything, two recent papers, one by Chinese scientists published in the January 2014 issue of Global and Planetary Change, and the other by U.S. scientists published in the May 2013 issue of Coastal Engineering, have shown a small decline in the rate of sea-level increase.

We are often being told that we're seeing more and more droughts, but a study published last March in the journal Nature actually shows a decrease in the world's surface that has been afflicted by droughts since 1982.

Hurricanes are likewise used as an example of the “ever worse” trope. If we look at the U.S., where we have the best statistics, damage costs from hurricanes are increasing—but only because there are more people, with more-expensive property, living near coastlines. If we adjust for population and wealth, hurricane damage during the period 1900-2013 decreased slightly. ...

And Jeff Jacoby says only jerks think 2014 was the hottest year on record.

Unless you've spent the last few weeks in solitary meditation on a remote island, you couldn't miss the wave of media stories breathlessly proclaiming that 2014 was the hottest year in recorded history. As usual, the coverage was laced with alarm about the menace posed by climate change, and with disapproval of skeptics who decline to join in the general panic.

Among those seizing on the news to make a political point was President Obama, who used his State of the Union address to voice disdain for those who don't share his view. “I've heard some folks try to dodge the evidence by saying they're not scientists,” he scoffed. “Well, I'm not a scientist, either. But. . . I know a lot of really good scientists at NASA, and NOAA, and at our major universities.”

Well, I'm also not a scientist. But I do know that what NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies and NOAA's National Climatic Data Center actually reported was rather less categorical than what the news accounts — or the White House — might lead you to believe. As both government agencies made clear in their briefing materials, the likelihood that 2014 was the planet's warmest year is far from a slam-dunk. Indeed, the probability that 2014 set a record is not 99 percent or 95 percent, but less than 50 percent. NOAA's number-crunchers put the probability at 48 percent; NASA's analysis came in at 38 percent. The agencies rationalize their attention-getting headline on the grounds that the probabilities were even lower for other candidates for the label of “hottest year in history.” ...

Scott Adams in Dilbert's Blog posts on science's biggest fail.

What's is science's biggest fail of all time?

*I nominate **everything about diet and fitness**.*

Maybe science has the diet and fitness stuff mostly right by now. I hope so. But I thought the same thing twenty years ago and I was wrong.

I used to think fatty food made you fat. Now it seems the opposite is true. Eating lots of peanuts, avocados, and cheese, for example, probably decreases your appetite and keeps you thin.

I used to think vitamins had been thoroughly studied for their health trade-offs. They haven't. The reason you take one multivitamin pill a day is marketing, not science. ...

... Science is an amazing thing. But it has a credibility issue that it earned. Should we fix the credibility situation by brainwashing skeptical citizens to believe in science despite its spotty track record, or is society's current level of skepticism healthier than it looks? Maybe science is what needs to improve, not the citizens.

I'm on the side that says climate change, for example, is pretty much what science says it is because the scientific consensus is high. But I realize half of my fellow-citizens disagree, based on pattern recognition. On one hand, the views of my fellow citizens might lead humanity to inaction on climate change and result in the extinction of humans. On the other hand, would I want to live in a world in which people stopped using pattern recognition to make decisions?

Those are two bad choices.

Power Line

[Our imperial president again shows his ignorance of history](#)

by Paul Mirengoff

No one has ever accused [President Obama](#) of knowing much about American history. He demonstrated his ignorance again during a pre-Super Bowl interview with Savannah Guthrie. Sharing a brew with Guthrie, [Obama told her](#), "We make beer. First president since George Washington to make some booze in the White House."

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Contentions

Obama's Budget and Our Potemkin Politics

by Seth Mandel

After President Obama's State of the Union address, I [noted](#) that even partisan-left media outlets were unwilling to play along with Obama's self-serving framing of his foreign policy. Now Obama's getting the same treatment on domestic policy as well. It's a rude awakening for a president so accustomed to being treated with kid gloves by an adoring media, and a sure sign he's officially a lame duck.

Obama has released his proposed budget, and commentators have been mostly unable to stifle their disbelief. To be fair, part of the reason Obama's budget is so unrealistic is that the Republicans currently control Congress, so it has no chance of passing. But in truth, that probably doesn't change its chances so much as it gives the president and his party's populists an excuse to claim Republican intransigence. Many Democrats surely don't want to be put in a position to vote for the taxman's anthem that is this budget document.

Here, [via the New York Times](#), are some of the ways it's being received by the left. A *Times* reporter's description of its content:

President Obama presented a [budget](#) on Monday that is more utopian vision than pragmatic blueprint. It proposes a politically improbable reshaping of the tax code and generous new social spending initiatives that would shift resources from the wealthy to the middle class.

The same reporter's take on what it's missing:

Absent from the plan is any pretense of trying to address the main drivers of the long-term debt — Social Security and Medicare — a quest that has long divided both parties and ultimately proved impossible. The document instead indicates that Mr. Obama, after years of being hemmed in on his fiscal priorities because of politics and balance sheets, feels newly free to outline an ambitious set of goals that will set the terms of a debate between Democrats and Republicans and shape the 2016 presidential election.

A former economic advisor to Vice President Biden's opinion of it:

"It's a visionary document and basically says, 'You're with me or you're not,' and we can have big philosophical arguments about the role of government, and perhaps in 2016 we will," said Jared Bernstein, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and a former top economic adviser to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.

Back to the *Times* reporter on Obama the Bipartisan Healer:

Yet the budget confirms that for Mr. Obama, the era of searching for a "grand bargain" with Republicans on entitlements and spending — an exercise that alienated liberal Democrats who were loath to consider any measure to rein in Medicare and Social Security — is over.

And all this, believe it or not, is still a favorable reading of it. The *Times* repeats uncritically the president's propagandistic declarations of "middle-class economics" and that the bill's tax increases would hit "the rich" without investigating how these taxes and fees would end up on the shoulders of the "middle class"—to say nothing of the president's own shots at confiscating middle-class cash, like his ill-fated 529 plan.

And it also takes as Gospel the idea that Obama has truly been searching, in good faith, for grand bipartisan solutions. The lesson of Obama's first six years, with occasional exceptions, is that "bipartisan" to Obama means that Republicans vote for his policies. The Democrats have shown they can file legislation without Republican input and without Republican amendments with a clear conscience. And during the rare times when Democrats and Republicans really were negotiating in good faith for a deal, Obama showed a propensity to sabotage those talks or poison the well.

So it might be more accurate to say that the era of *pretending* to search for a "grand bargain" is officially over. And that, in its own way, is the one honest aspect of the budget. The rest is theater. And theater is, increasingly, what national politics has become.

There's the State of the Union itself, which is clear pageantry made all the more intolerable by the orchestrated applause and non-applause, standing and sitting, laughing and scowling from the congressional audience. There are the presidential nominating conventions, which are devoid of drama of any kind. (Though the Democrats' 2012 convention did have that one hectic unscripted moment when the party's delegates angrily voted down adding pro-Israel language to the party's platform.)

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Examiner

Obama's budget: Bad policy, bad politics

by Michael Barone

Word comes that Barack Obama's budget will, not surprisingly, call for ending the sequester spending limits now in effect. That's not surprising. White House aides proposed the sequester, but Obama thought it wouldn't go into effect because Republicans couldn't accept its sharp limits on defense spending. But with voters recoiling against foreign military involvement, they could and did.

At the time, Keynesian economists predicted that the sequester — "austerity" — would squelch economic growth. And they predicted that Republicans' failure to continue extending unemployment benefits beyond 26 weeks would result in mass misery.

The Keynesian predictions have proven unfounded. The 2009 stimulus, much of it devoted to preserving public employee union jobs, didn't seem to stimulate much. Growth after the tough early 2014 winter, though still not dazzling, has been stronger than in pre-sequester years. Unemployment fell sharply as an end of benefits prompted workers to find jobs and employers to hire them.

Obama will argue for more spending on the grounds that the federal budget deficit is now sharply down. It is: The Congressional Budget Office says it declined from 10 percent of gross domestic product in his first year in office — blame George W. Bush and the financial crisis is you like — to around the 50-year average of 2.7 percent.

The sequester contributed to that by holding down spending. But credit also goes to the fact that our tax system is much more progressive than you'd gather from Obama's rhetoric. CBO reports that the top 20 percent of earners pay 70 percent of all federal taxes, and the top 1 percent pay 24 percent.

The U.S. tax system is actually more progressive than the systems of Western European welfare states that rely heavily on value-added (i.e., sales) taxes. Those can be raised stealthily, without even showing up on credit card receipts. U.S. income tax increases show up on every worker's pay stub and W-2 form.

Progressive taxes produce volatile revenue streams, plunging when profits and capital gains are low, zooming upward when they're high. That's because high incomes and capital gains are volatile, and high earners can, legally and morally, structure their affairs to minimize taxation. So even in period of tepid economic growth, federal revenues rose from 15 percent of GDP in 2009 to 17 percent in 2014 — not as much as in the early 1980s recovery or the late 1990s bubble, but still significant.

Yet there are limits. In the 2008 campaign, ABC's Charlie Gibson asked Obama if he would raise capital gains taxes even if, as has often been the case, that would mean lower tax revenues. Obama said yes. For him "fairness" meant taking more of people's money even if the government ends up with less. That reduces after-tax economic inequality. But it doesn't help reduce federal budget deficits.

To do that, you have to do more than raise tax rates on high earners. As Bloomberg's Megan McArdle writes, "We are simply running out of room to pay for generous new programs with higher taxes on the small handful of people who make many hundreds of thousands of dollars a year."

Income taxes as a percentage of GDP, the CBO reports, are already approaching the highest level in the last 50 years. To exceed that level, you have to go where the money is — you have to raise taxes on the middle class.

Obama claims he's advocating "middle class economics." But a Brookings-Urban Institute study showed his tax and economic policies would produce no significant gains for those on the middle 60 percent of the income ladder.

And Obama had to ditch his proposal to tax withdrawals from 529 college savings accounts after protests not just from Republicans but from Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chris Van Hollen, who represent affluent gentry liberal districts.

In any case, as CBO reports, the budget deficit is on track to rise as a percentage of GDP far in future years. Entitlements — Social Security, disability insurance, Medicare — will eat up a growing slice of the economy.

Obama's Democrats have rejected all attempts at entitlement reform. At every opportunity they opt to run one more campaign assailing Republicans for cutting Social Security or Medicare, even though the over-65 crowd has become a solidly Republican voting bloc.

So entitlement spending will increasingly squeeze out spending on Democrats' domestic wish lists. That puts pressure on Democrats to raise taxes that will inevitably fall on the middle class, and more so as Keynesian policies sputter. Bad policy is, sooner or later, bad politics.

USA Today - Editorial

Obama's not entitled to ignore the deficit

Budget plan wouldn't deal with long-term financial woes, driven largely by the soaring costs of benefit programs.

Much of the controversy over the \$4 trillion budget President Obama released Monday has focused on what it would do: hike taxes on corporations and the wealthy, cut taxes for the middle class and spend more on infrastructure.

But more important is what the spending plan would not do. It wouldn't deal with the government's long-term financial woes, driven largely by the soaring costs of benefit programs.

Sure, the president's projected deficits for the next few years would dip below \$500 billion, after topping \$1 trillion during his first four years. But with [10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day](#), it's delusional to view deficit control as mission accomplished. The Congressional Budget Office, which projects further out than the White House, predicts [annual deficits back over \\$1 trillion](#) in 10 years.

The nation's fiscal woes are not caused by spending too much on highways, defense, scientific research and other core government functions. In fact, Obama is right to call for an end to the counterproductive cuts to these programs, known as "sequestration," as long as revenue is raised to offset the cost.

The real problem is that neither Obama nor Congress wants to tackle the cost of popular entitlements such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps and veterans' benefits.

Those programs are surging in cost because the number of retirees is growing and because health care costs have, until recently, risen much faster than inflation. But mostly, they are going up because they operate on autopilot.

Together, the [entitlements are expected to cost](#) a staggering \$2.3 trillion this year, according to CBO. That's three-fifths of all spending. In 10 years that figure is forecast to hit \$3.6 trillion — nearly the cost of Obama's entire budget.

Early in his presidency, Obama claimed to care about that danger. He held a summit at the White House on the deficit. And not long after, he created a presidential commission, whose recommendations he promptly ignored. Mention of slowing the growth of these programs has largely disappeared from his speeches and his budgets.

Congressional Republicans have been just as bad. While Obama was willing to make some modest restraints in the growth of Medicare and Social Security as part of a deficit deal with House Speaker John Boehner in 2011, rank-and-file Republicans rebelled and forced Boehner to walk away.

Since then, both sides have stopped talking about entitlements. Obama has begun treating the budget as little more than a vehicle to argue about income inequality. His pitch plays to the Democratic base, but it ignores the fact that the trillions thrown into retirement and health care rob from long-term investments that would help alleviate income inequality.

Republicans, meanwhile, have narrowed their fiscal focus to killing Obamacare and cutting and simplifying corporate taxes.

The budget the president unveiled Monday portends no change in either side's position. It is yet another missed opportunity to deal with a problem that will only grow larger as Washington waits.

WSJ

The Alarming Thing About Climate Alarmism

Exaggerated, worst-case claims result in bad policy and they ignore a wealth of encouraging data.

by Bjørn Lomborg

It is an indisputable fact that carbon emissions are rising—and faster than most scientists predicted. But many climate-change alarmists seem to claim that all climate change is worse than expected. This ignores that much of the data are actually encouraging. The latest [study](#) from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that in the previous 15 years temperatures had risen 0.09 degrees Fahrenheit. The average of all models expected 0.8 degrees. So we're seeing about 90% less temperature rise than expected.

Facts like this are important because a one-sided focus on worst-case stories is a poor foundation for sound policies. Yes, Arctic sea ice is melting faster than the models expected. But models also predicted that Antarctic sea ice would decrease, yet it is increasing. Yes, sea levels are rising, but the rise is not accelerating—if anything, two recent papers, one by Chinese scientists published in the January 2014 issue of [Global and Planetary Change](#), and the other by U.S. scientists published in the May 2013 issue of [Coastal Engineering](#), have shown a small decline in the rate of sea-level increase.

We are often being told that we're seeing more and more droughts, but a [study](#) published last March in the journal *Nature* actually shows a decrease in the world's surface that has been afflicted by droughts since 1982.

Hurricanes are likewise used as an example of the “ever worse” trope. If we look at the U.S., where we have the best statistics, damage costs from hurricanes are increasing—but only because there are more people, with more-expensive property, living near coastlines. If we adjust for population and wealth, hurricane damage during the period 1900-2013 decreased slightly.

At the U.N. climate conference in Lima, Peru, in December, attendees were told that their countries should cut carbon emissions to avoid future damage from storms like typhoon Hagupit, which hit the Philippines during the conference, killing at least 21 people and forcing more than a million into shelters. Yet the trend for landfalling typhoons around the Philippines has actually declined since 1950, according to a [study](#) published in 2012 by the American Meteorological Society's *Journal of Climate*. Again, we're told that things are worse than ever, but the facts don't support this.

This is important because if we want to help the poor people who are most threatened by natural disasters, we have to recognize that it is less about cutting carbon emissions than it is about pulling them out of poverty.

The best way to see this is to look at the world's deaths from natural disasters over time. In the Oxford University database for death rates from floods, extreme temperatures, droughts and storms, the average in the first part of last century was more than 13 dead every year per 100,000 people. Since then the death rates have dropped 97% to a new low in the 2010s of 0.38 per 100,000 people.

The dramatic decline is mostly due to economic development that helps nations withstand catastrophes. If you're rich like Florida, a major hurricane might cause plenty of damage to expensive buildings, but it kills few people and causes a temporary dent in economic output. If a similar hurricane hits a poorer country like the Philippines or Guatemala, it kills many more and can devastate the economy.

In short, climate change is not worse than we thought. Some indicators are worse, but some are better. That doesn't mean global warming is not a reality or not a problem. It definitely is. But the narrative that the world's climate is changing from bad to worse is unhelpful alarmism, which prevents us from focusing on smart solutions.

A well-meaning environmentalist might argue that, because climate change is a reality, why not ramp up the rhetoric and focus on the bad news to make sure the public understands its importance. But isn't that what has been done for the past 20 years? The public has been bombarded with dramatic headlines and apocalyptic photos of climate change and its consequences. Yet despite endless successions of climate summits, carbon emissions continue to rise, especially in rapidly developing countries like India, China and many African nations.

Alarmism has encouraged the pursuit of a one-sided climate policy of trying to cut carbon emissions by subsidizing wind farms and solar panels. Yet today, according to the International Energy Agency, only about 0.4% of global energy consumption comes from solar photovoltaics and windmills. And even with exceptionally optimistic assumptions about future deployment of wind and solar, the IEA expects that these energy forms will provide a minuscule 2.2% of the world's energy by 2040.

In other words, for at least the next two decades, solar and wind energy are simply expensive, feel-good measures that will have an imperceptible climate impact. Instead, we should focus on investing in research and development of green energy, including new battery technology to better store and discharge solar and wind energy and lower its costs. We also need to invest in and promote growth in the world's poorest nations, which suffer the most from natural disasters.

Climate-change doomsayers notwithstanding, we urgently need balance if we are to make sensible choices and pick the right climate policy that can help humanity slow, and inevitably adapt to, climate change.

Mr. Lomborg, director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, is the author of "The Skeptical Environmentalist" (Cambridge Press, 2001) and "Cool It" (Knopf, 2007).

Boston Globe

No, 2014 wasn't the 'warmest year in history'

by Jeff Jacoby

Unless you've spent the last few weeks in solitary meditation on [a remote island](#), you couldn't miss the wave of [media stories](#) breathlessly [proclaiming](#) that 2014 was the hottest year in [recorded history](#). As usual, the coverage was laced with alarm about the menace posed by climate change, and with [disapproval of skeptics](#) who decline to join in the general panic.

Among those seizing on the news to make a political point was President Obama, who used his [State of the Union address](#) to voice disdain for those who don't share his view. "I've heard some folks try to dodge the evidence by saying they're not scientists," he scoffed. "Well, I'm not a scientist, either. But. . . I know a lot of really good scientists at NASA, and NOAA, and at our major universities."

Well, I'm also not a scientist. But I do know that what NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies and NOAA's National Climatic Data Center actually reported was rather less categorical than what the news accounts — or the White House — might lead you to believe. As both government agencies made clear in their briefing materials, the likelihood that 2014 was the planet's warmest year is far from a slam-dunk. Indeed, the probability that 2014 set a record is not 99 percent or 95 percent, but [less than 50 percent](#). NOAA's number-crunchers put the probability at 48 percent; NASA's analysis came in at 38 percent. The agencies rationalize their [attention-getting headline](#) on the grounds that the probabilities were even lower for other candidates for the label of "hottest year in history."

But other compilers of the standard global temperature datasets have been more circumspect. The report from the [UK Met Office](#) noted only that "2014 was one of the warmest years in a record dating back to 1850." [Given the size of the margin of error](#), it acknowledged, "It's not possible to definitively say which of several recent years was the warmest." Similarly, the Berkeley Earth summary of its 2014 calculations explained that last year's bottom line was statistically identical to other recent years. "Therefore," [it noted candidly](#), "it is impossible to conclude from our analysis which of 2014, 2010, or 2005 was actually the warmest year."

All of which reasonably leads to the conclusion *not* that the planet has been relentlessly warming, but that the warming trend that peaked at the end of the 1990s has neither resumed nor reversed. Global warming has more or less been on hold since the turn of the 21st century. That hiatus poses something of [an inconvenient truth](#) to those who believe that anthropogenic carbon-dioxide is the key driver of climate change, since CO2 emissions have continued without letup.

You don't have to be a scientist to realize that climate is complicated and hard to get right. Climate models have so far been unable to accurately predict changes in global temperature. Experts didn't foresee the global cooling that began in the 1940s and [didn't anticipate the warming cycle](#) that started in the late 1970s. Climate science is still in its infancy, and it would be folly to treat any single explanation for changes in global temperatures as impervious to challenge or skepticism.

In fact, the very idea of a "global temperature" is hard to make sense of. How can an entire planet, with its multifarious systems, be said to have a temperature, or even an average temperature?

Averaging is a familiar and useful concept that we use in a myriad of contexts. Average household income, average life expectancy, average weight of airline passengers, average number of earned runs given up by a pitcher, average daily temperature in Waikiki in April — each is a

comprehensible and meaningful statistic. But as the authors of [a provocative 2007 paper](#) in the Journal of Non-Equilibrium Thermodynamics explain, there are certain kinds of variables that lose all meaning if they are averaged. For example, exchange rates are extremely useful when comparing two currencies. The notion of a “global exchange rate,” however, would be absurd.

Temperatures on the earth are in constant flux. They change with latitude, with time of day, with season, with weather; they vary from ocean depths to atmospheric heights, from the equator to the poles. Even assuming that the necessary raw data could be properly gathered, mathematicians must choose among multiple averaging techniques, which can yield [flatly contradictory results](#).

Physically, there is no such thing as the “global temperature trend,” the authors conclude. Hence, “ranking this or that year as the ‘warmest of the millennium’ is not possible, since other averages will give other results with no grounds for choosing among them.”

As headline fodder, “warmest year ever” may be irresistible. As an unassailable reality on which critical public policy questions should turn? Be skeptical.

Dilbert's Blog

[Science's Biggest Fail](#)

by Scott Adams

What's is science's biggest fail of all time?

I nominate ***everything about diet and fitness***.

Maybe science has the diet and fitness stuff mostly right by now. I hope so. But I thought the same thing twenty years ago and I was wrong.

I used to think fatty food made you fat. Now it seems the opposite is true. Eating lots of peanuts, avocados, and cheese, for example, probably decreases your appetite and keeps you thin.

I used to think vitamins had been thoroughly studied for their health trade-offs. They haven't. The reason you take one multivitamin pill a day is marketing, not science.

I used to think the U.S. food pyramid was good science. In the past it was not, and I assume it is not now.

I used to think drinking one glass of alcohol a day is good for health, but now I think that idea is probably just a correlation found in studies.

I used to think I needed to drink a crazy-large amount of water each day, because smart people said so, but that wasn't science either.

I could go on for an hour.

You might be tempted to say my real issue is with a ***lack*** of science, not with science. In some of the cases I mentioned there was a general belief that science had studied stuff when in fact it had not. So one could argue that the media and the government (schools in particular) are to blame for

allowing so much non-science to taint the field of real science. And we all agree that science is not intended to be foolproof. Science is about crawling toward the truth over time.

Perhaps my expectations were too high. I expected science to tell me the best ways to eat and to exercise. Science did the opposite, sometimes because of misleading studies and sometimes by being silent when bad science morphed into popular misconceptions. And science was pretty damned cocky about being right during this period in which it was so wrong.

So you have the direct problem of science collectively steering my entire generation toward obesity, diabetes, and coronary problems. But the indirect problem might be worse: **It is hard to trust science.**

Today I saw a link to an [article in Mother Jones](#) bemoaning the fact that the general public is out of step with the consensus of science on important issues. The implication is that science is right and the general public are idiots. But my take is different.

I think science has earned its lack of credibility with the public. If you kick me in the balls for 20-years, how do you expect me to close my eyes and trust you?

If a person doesn't believe climate change is real, despite all the evidence to the contrary, is that a case of a dumb human or a science that has not earned credibility? We humans operate on pattern recognition. The pattern science serves up, thanks to its winged monkeys in the media, is something like this:

Step One: We are totally sure the answer is X.

Step Two: Oops. X is wrong. But Y is totally right. Trust us this time.

Science isn't about being right every time, or even most of the time. It is about being *more* right over time and fixing what it got wrong. So how is a common citizen supposed to know when science is "done" and when it is halfway to done which is the same as being wrong?

You can't tell. And if any scientist says you should be able to tell when science is "done" on a topic, please show me the data indicating that people have psychic powers.

So maybe we should stop scoffing at people who don't trust science and ask ourselves why. Ignorance might be *part* of the problem. But I think the bigger issue is that science is a "mostly wrong" situation by design that is intended to become more right over time. How do you make people trust a system that is designed to get wrong answers more often than right answers? And should we?

I'm pro-science because the alternatives are worse. (Example: ISIS.) I'm sure most of you are on the same side. But can we stop being surprised when people don't believe science? Humans can't turn off pattern recognition. There's a good reason trust in science is low. Science failed my generation on the topic of food and exercise the same way science failed my parents generation with cigarettes.

Some of the problem is visual, I assume. I can see with my own eyes my fellow-citizens getting fat but I can't see a scientist making a useful breakthrough in a lab. The successes in science are often hidden from view and the problems are not. So that has to be factored in. While science is mostly good and useful, there's a tendency to more easily remember the mistakes than the breakthroughs.

And we all know that studies funded by private industry are suspect. There's plenty of that too.

Science is an amazing thing. But it has a credibility issue that it earned. Should we fix the credibility situation by brainwashing skeptical citizens to believe in science despite its spotty track record, or is society's current level of skepticism healthier than it looks? Maybe science is what needs to improve, not the citizens.

I'm on the side that says climate change, for example, is pretty much what science says it is because the scientific consensus is high. But I realize half of my fellow-citizens disagree, based on pattern recognition. On one hand, the views of my fellow citizens might lead humanity to inaction on climate change and result in the extinction of humans. On the other hand, would I want to live in a world in which people stopped using pattern recognition to make decisions?

Those are two bad choices.





