



SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

From a tweet, a March for Science is born

Plans for 22 April demonstrations spread to more than 100 cities around the world

By **Lindzi Wessel**

It was a tweet that brought them together. “Hell hath no fury like a scientist silenced,” Caroline Weinberg, a public health educator and science writer in New York City, tweeted late last month. As a result of worries about the impact that President Donald Trump’s administration might have on scientists, Weinberg’s tweet also floated the idea of a “science march” to highlight the importance of research. Someone suggested she contact Jonathan Berman, a like-minded postdoctoral fellow studying hypertension at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, who had already set up a Twitter handle: @ScienceMarchDC.

A few retweets later, “things just blew up,” Weinberg says. Within days, the science march account had more than 300,000 followers and a “secret” Facebook group had more than 800,000 members. And last week, Weinberg, Berman, and a third co-organizer, anthropology doctoral student Valorie Aquino of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, officially announced that a March for Science would be held on 22 April in Washington, D.C. Science advocates in more than 100 cities around the world say they will hold allied demonstrations the same day.

The marches will be not just for scientists, but for “anyone who believes in empirical science,” the organizers emphasize on the March for Science web page. The demonstrations are meant to be a celebration of science, they say, as well as “a call to support and safeguard the scientific community.”

But although the march has garnered the endorsement of many prominent scientists and some scientific societies, others have so far remained on the sidelines, cautioning in part that the march could paint scientists as just another partisan special interest in an already highly polarized political climate. If the event is “interpreted as ‘These people who like science are marching against Trump,’ it could politicize science even more and potentially hurt public trust in science as an institution,” says communications researcher Dominique Brossard, who specializes in public attitudes on scientific issues at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

“In the current political climate, we must calculate very carefully the possible ramifications” of backing the march, Andrew Black, chief of staff of AAAS (publisher of *Science*) in Washington, D.C., wrote in a 1 February email to the staff of the organization, which has about 100,000 members and bills itself as the world’s largest

general scientific society. AAAS has not yet decided whether to endorse or participate in the march.

The debate over the march’s wisdom is just part of the whirlwind that has engulfed its amateur organizers, who have yet to meet in person. “I’ve lost so much weight from forgetting to eat,” Aquino says. In just weeks, the organizers have created a web page, written a mission statement, and established a set of core principles. A donate button on the march’s website has been getting hits despite little promotion, and an online store selling swag had racked up more than \$10,000 in sales of \$25 T-shirts as of 7 February. The trio has also recruited more than a dozen people to fill a steering committee and key organizing posts. Some 40,000 volunteers are waiting for assignments. And Twitter accounts have sprung up to promote global sister marches in Europe; Canada; Mexico; Puerto Rico; Australia; New Zealand; Hong Kong, China; and possibly Japan.

The organizers have also been reaching out to established groups for help and support. An alliance with the Earth Day Network, an environmental advocacy group that has been around for some 4 decades, helped cement Earth Day as the march date. Sigma Xi, a research honor society that has some 110,000 members

Scientists are no strangers to demonstrations. Here, researchers in London protest budget cuts in 2010.

and is based in Durham, North Carolina, announced on 3 February it would be an official partner. Also endorsing the march: the American Society for Cell Biology in Bethesda, Maryland (9000 members), as well as the American Sociological Association (13,000 members) and the Association for Psychological Science (33,000 members), both based in Washington, D.C. The American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA, 1700 members) discovered the march will conflict with the last day of its annual meeting, scheduled for a venue in New Orleans, Louisiana, that is eight blocks from the starting point of that city's planned march. So AAPA leaders decided to cancel that day's plenary talk and lead attendees to the demonstration.

Like AAAS, other science groups are still mulling. The American Geophysical Union (AGU, 60,000 members) in Washington, D.C., is "working to figure out what, if any, role is appropriate for a group like AGU, since it's a march organized by 'the people,'" AGU Executive Director Christine McEntee said in a statement. "There's a lot that has yet to be worked out," Crispin Taylor, head of the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) in Rockville, Maryland (about 4000 members), wrote in an email. "That said, to the extent that the march organizers maintain their emphasis on a positive and apolitical message regarding empirical science and its role in decision making, I expect that, at a minimum, ASPB will support the participation of its members."

Brossard, for one, worries that it will be hard for the science marchers to stay on a nonpartisan message, given the diversity of march allies and participants. And Harvard University physicist Cherry Murray, who recently stepped down from her post as director of the Department of Energy's Office of Science, told *Science* that scientists might better press their case by encouraging members of Congress to support research funding, and by finding ways to work with the Trump administration, rather than protest against it.

March organizers say it is not either-or. They hope the event will catalyze all kinds of actions in support of science, including lobbying policymakers. But "the time has long passed where it's OK to stay silent," says Weinberg, noting that although the march is nonpartisan, getting politicians to pay attention to science in policy is a major goal. "The point of science is getting to the truth and helping us understand the world, and acting as though this has no role in politics is ridiculous." ■

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Grad students, postdocs with U.S. visas face uncertainty

New worries over draft order on skilled worker visas

By Meredith Wadman and Richard Stone

The postdoc faces an excruciating choice. He has 6 months left on a U.S. work permit issued to many foreign graduate students and postdocs: a 1-year Optional Practical Training (OPT) permit. OPTs are routinely extended for two more years for those in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). But the developmental biologist, who works at a major California university, is from Iran, one of seven countries whose citizens are banned from travel to the United States for 90 days as new vetting procedures are put in place. (U.S. courts on 3 and 5 February put an emergency stay on the ban; an appeal by the Trump administration was pending at press time.)

The postdoc, who did not want to be identified for fear of drawing unwanted attention, must now decide whether to continue with his work on stem cells—gambling that the U.S. government by summer will be inclined to grant him an extension—or spend the next half-year boning up on techniques that will help him secure a position outside the United States. That would be a "drastic change in what I'm doing," he says—one he would need to make immediately.

The most visible effect of President Donald Trump's executive order on immigration was

to halt travelers from the target countries. But the unnamed scientist's plight highlights another consequence for grad students and postdocs already in the United States from the seven countries—Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Sudan. For those here on OPT and student visas, who number in the tens of thousands, visa renewal is far from assured in the uncertain legal and political situation. The dilemma "simply ruins their future. It's a catastrophe," says a Yemeni biologist who is on a university faculty on an H-1B, a 3-year visa for professionals. Even with his H-1B, on which 2.5 years remain before it needs renewal, the biologist says that he is now mulling a "plan B and C all the time."

Lawyers are grappling with how to advise those facing such uncertainties. "There's a lot of rumor and conjecture out there," says Brendan Delaney, a partner at Leavy, Frank & Delaney in Bethesda, Maryland, who advises the National Postdoctoral Association. "It's a fluid and changing situation, and unfortunately we don't know how this is going to play out."

Among the seven countries, Iran is being hit hardest: Forty-eight percent of visas issued to nationals of the target countries in 2015 went to Iranians, according to the State Department. Of the roughly 15,000 Iranian



More rigorous vetting, as well as a possible overhaul of visa programs for skilled workers, could constrict the flow of science talent into the United States.



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Science **355** (6325), 556-557. [doi: 10.1126/science.355.6325.556]

Editor's Summary

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