

## 13 Better Things To Read Than Bret Stephens' First New York Times Column

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The New York Times took a lot of heat for hiring Bret Stephens, a former opinion writer at The Wall Street Journal, as its newest columnist. There was a lot to criticize. In his storied tenure on some of the most radically conservative pages in print journalism, Stephens accused Arabs of suffering a “disease of the mind,” railed against the Black Lives Matter movement and dismissed the rise of campus rape as an “imaginary enemy.”

But Stephens' views on climate change — namely that the jury is still out on whether burning fossil fuels is the chief cause — drew the widest condemnation. [ThinkProgress](#) admonished the Gray Lady for hiring an “extreme climate denier,” and famed climatologist Michael Mann backed them up in the critique. [DeSmog Blog](#), a site whose tagline reads “clearing the PR pollution that clouds climate science,” reported on a letter from climate scientists who are canceling their subscriptions to the newspaper over its latest hire. [In These Times](#)' headline pointedly asked: “Why the Hell did the New York Times just hire a climate denier?”

Even the Times' own reporters [publicly questioned](#) the hire.

Late Friday afternoon, Stephens made his debut. In a column boldly titled “Climate of Complete Certainty,” he provocatively compared the climate activists' surety to that of Hillary Clinton's failed campaign managers.

“Claiming total certainty about the science traduces the spirit of science and creates openings for doubt whenever a climate claim proves wrong,” he wrote. “Demanding abrupt and expensive changes in public policy raises fair questions about ideological intentions. Censoriously asserting one's moral superiority and treating skeptics as imbeciles and deplorables wins few converts.”

He couches this, of course, by denying that he's denying anything.

“None of this is to deny climate change or the possible severity of its consequences,” he wrote. “But ordinary citizens also have a right to be skeptical of an overweening scientism. They know — as all environmentalists should — that history is littered with the human wreckage of scientific errors married to political power.”

Sure, that's a fair general point about science, but it misses the problem with climate science denial altogether. Environmental consciousness didn't used to be partisan. Lest we forget, President Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency. But [NPR's On The Media](#) did a nice job of explaining how Democrats, under President Bill Clinton, co-opted the

environmental movement for political purposes, clearing the way for Republicans to fight against climate regulations as a sort of zero-sum game.

In a photo from July 2015, Bret Stephens, then a Wall Street Journal opinion columnist, moderated a talk with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) at the Christians United for Israel summit in Washington.

Over the last three decades, the proliferation of right-wing infotainment masquerading as news has constructed a massive echo chamber in which politically inconvenient facts are easily drowned out by the shouts of bombastic TV and radio hosts. Stephens, from his perch at the Journal, continued to give intellectual cover to fossil fuel interests well after the evidentiary scales tilted overwhelmingly in the direction of scientists who believe in manmade climate change. As Samantha Ahdoot, a Virginia pediatrician who joined a group of medical professionals advocating for climate science, recently told HuffPost: “If doctors waited for absolute certainty, they’d never treat a single patient because there’s nothing that we do that’s based on certainty. There’s only best available evidence. That’s what doctors use to care for patients. The best available information today, as determined by over 97 percent of climatologists and every legitimate scientific organization in the world, is that rising greenhouse gases are warming our planet.”

In that spirit, if you must read Stephens’ op-ed, I humbly also prescribe these 13 other stories I read in the last week. They will leave you much better informed about the state of climate science than anything in the opinion pages of our country’s newspaper of record, at least today.

- At The Intercept, Sharon Lerner interviewed Jerry Taylor, a former professional climate-change denier who once led the energy and environment task force for the American Legislative Exchange Council and served as vice president of the Cato Institute. Now the director of the Niskanen Center, a libertarian think tank that works to convert climate skeptics into climate activists, he discusses how he discovered the lies behind the climate denial movement and changed his ways.
- At Mother Jones, Rebecca Leber made a formidable entry to the bonanza of assessments about President Donald Trump’s first 100 days with a story examining how climate change deniers, relegated to fringe conspiracy theorists under the Obama administration, have enjoyed a powerful return to the mainstream over the last three months.
- At The New Yorker, Tom Kizzia probed at the paradox facing Inuit whale hunters in Alaska, whose traditional hunting grounds face the threat of climate change caused by the oil industry they depend on financially.
- At Texas Monthly, Sonia Smith writes about Katharine Hayhoe, a global warming expert at Texas Tech who is trying to sway more of her fellow evangelical Christians to accept the scientific consensus on manmade climate change.
- At The New York Times — in its news section — Justin Gillis chronicled the looming fate of Tasmania’s aptly named Isle of the Dead, site of an infamous British penal colony. The island, ironically also home to a defunct coal mine, is, as Gillis writes, “being chewed away by the sea” as tides rise thanks to melting polar ice caps.

- At [InsideClimate News](#), whose oil pipeline coverage won the Pulitzer Prize in 2013, Nicholas Kusnetz wrote about the exodus of energy giants from Canada's tar sands, a particularly dirty blend of clay, sand and viscous oil that produces a low-grade fuel. The Keystone XL pipeline project, which Trump restarted on his fourth day in office, would carry tar sands oil down to refineries in Texas, the product from which would be sold for export.
- At [The Guardian](#), 24-year-old activist poet Devi Lockwood issued a callout to readers to meet her on Saturday in Washington, D.C., where she'll be collecting hundreds of climate change stories for her oral history project, [1,001 Stories](#).
- At [Vox](#), Matteen Mokalla published a video interview with Debbie Dooley, the Tea Party activist behind the group Conservatives for Energy Freedom, which advocates for the expansion of renewable energy and notes that her ideological bedfellows have "been brainwashed for decades into believing we're not damaging the environment."
- At [The New Republic](#), Emily Atkin makes a compelling case for why Bill Nye, the ubiquitous science advocate and host of a new show on Netflix, is the wrong person to lead a climate fight that has become increasingly urgent under the Trump administration.
- At [The Washington Post](#), Chris Mooney and Juliet Eilperin took a look at the schism within the White House over how, or whether, to deal with climate change.
- At [Bloomberg](#), Eric Roston — who last week launched a new vertical at the financial news giant dedicated to climate change — goes deep into how local meteorologists have begun explaining the weather in the context of how global warming is reshaping forecasts. "The safe and familiar on-air meteorologist," he writes, "with little notice by viewers, has become a public diplomat for global warming."
- At [Climate Central](#), Bobby Magill dug into a Columbia University report that examines how small a role environmental regulations played in the decline of the coal industry.
- At [HuffPost](#), my talented colleague Dominique Mosbergen found some new compelling ways to make us think about the tremendous amount of plastic pollution in the oceans.

If you're in the D.C. area, thousands of people are planning to protest in the People's Climate March on what could be a record-breaking hot day. Take from that what you will.