



Under Biden, Will Government Be Blinded by “Science”?

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On January 15, the Biden team announced that Eric Lander (shown) would become director of the Office of Science Technology and Policy and would also be the chief advisor on scientific matters to the president. Lander’s role would also become a cabinet-level position.

Lander is the president and founding director of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. He is, according to his [official bio](#), a “geneticist, molecular biologist, and mathematician, [and] he has played a pioneering role in all aspects of the reading, understanding, and biomedical application of the human genome. He was a principle leader of the international Human Genome Project.”

Lander is, in fact, a well-known and respected scientist. But he is also a controversial big-government scientist. His leadership position with the Human Genome Project is a case in point. That was a quintessential big-government project, lavishly funded off the backs of taxpayers. Meanwhile, a competitive private project led by the noted scientist J. Craig Venter completed the same task in less time with more innovative means and both Venter and the public Genome Project were credited publicly with the achievement of sequencing the human genome.

During the process, though, tempers flared and Lander’s attacks on the private effort “stung Venter, who later revealed ... staff referred to their nemesis as ‘Eric Slander,’” [Buzzfeed News recalled](#).

Nonetheless, it is not Lander’s scientific background, his past achievements, or his occasional courting of controversy that is a problem in the context of the Biden appointment of the MIT scientist. The problem is the elevation of science to dogma that Biden’s — and the Left’s — actions and rhetoric reveal.

“Science will always be at the forefront of my administration,” Biden has said, and left-leaning tech news site [Arstechnica celebrated the appointment](#) of Lander with this headline: “As it turns out, the Biden administration *will* listen to scientists.”

Elaborating further, Arstechnica’s Eric Berger wrote: “The Biden administration’s naming of a science team early on suggests it will prioritize science and evidence-based decision making toward policy.”

The problem with this is that scientific evidence is often incomplete and sometimes completely wrong. And what happens, then, in cases where policy is based on completely incorrect scientific findings?

If this sounds like anti-science rhetoric, then you don't know enough about science. The scientific method requires forming and testing hypotheses about natural phenomena. Those results are then tested and retested, resulting in degrees of falsification and verification. New information from tests is added to old, and new variables are tested in new hypotheses resulting in more falsification and verification. There are blind allies and there are discoveries, but the process is never complete. There is always more to learn.

Scientific dogmatists, however, act and speak as if there is nothing new to learn and that science has once and for all delivered to our doorsteps the fount of all truth. This belief, which is deeply anti-science, has taken firm root in the soul of the progressive Left. Whenever you hear statements that contain phrases such as "scientists have concluded" or "the scientific consensus is," you are hearing dogma being used to browbeat opponents into submission. What you are not hearing is anything related to actual science.

There have been times in the past when scientific dogma was made the foundation for public policy, and some of those times have been very dark chapters in human history.

Perhaps the most prominent case in point is the "science" of eugenics, which was both very popular and very influential during the first half of the 20th century in the United States and elsewhere.

As the scientific consensus at the time informed Americans, some people were genetically inferior, while others were born with genetic problems and were thus defective. Such idiotic concerns drove policy, and in 1924 were the basis for the passage of the federal Immigration Act of that year, which sought to keep Southern European immigrants and other "undesirables" out of the country.

The act was introduced into Congress by U.S. Representative Albert Johnson who, as Cato Institute's Alex Nowrasteh noted in 2016, was "chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization" and "was also the head of the Eugenics Research Association."

Johnson appointed a leading "scientist" of the time, Harry Laughlin, to be an expert eugenics advisor to the panel, which meant, in modern Democrat parlance, Representative Johnson was "listening to scientists."

The eugenics-based 1924 immigration measure passed handily, and it was the law of the land for many years. But eugenics was just getting started as a driver of absurd and dangerous policy. Laughlin continued as one of the most influential backers of the eugenics consensus, playing a role in legitimizing compulsory sterilization. He was assistant director of the Eugenics Record Office of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and the author of *Eugenic Sterilization in the United States*, published by the Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, which contained as a chapter Laughlin's "Model Eugenical Sterilization Law."

The pernicious influence of eugenics reached the U.S. Supreme Court. After passing its eugenics law in 1924, the state of Virginia sought to sterilize Carrie Buck, a rape victim who the state decided was “feeble-minded.” Coming before the Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes delivered the opinion of an 8-1 majority, which found that Virginia could proceed with the sterilization. Said Justice Holmes:

We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetence. It is better for all the world if, instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes.

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/274/200/>

Note carefully, as an important aside here given current events, the chilling comparison Justice Holmes makes between forced vaccination and forced sterilization.

Holmes added this astonishing insulting remark: “Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”

In the wake of this decision, Carrie Buck was forcibly sterilized by the state of Virginia on October 9, 1927. Thousands more Americans were similarly sterilized against their will on eugenics grounds.

It should also be noted that Laughlin, the influential eugenicist who played a large role in advising U.S. government eugenics-based policies, was also influential overseas. His model eugenics law was influential in Germany where the Nazis passed their “Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” that bore more than a passing similarity to Laughlin’s preferred policies.

Laughlin was also an internationalist and ardent proponent of world government, and his ideas reached to Edward Mandell House, perhaps the leading advocate of such schemes, who was the most influential advisor to President Woodrow Wilson.

The bloody history of the eugenics movement means that it is looked upon with scorn now, but for the first half of the 20th century, it was considered “settled science” and politicians acted accordingly.

Science is never settled, in fact, and basing policy on science dogma can end badly — and has. Policy, instead, should be based on much more than science, and not least upon philosophy, history, the common law, and first principles, but also on common sense.

All of these are lacking today in the modern fetishization of scientific dogma.