

Let's Talk

Author: Beardsley, Timothy M.

Source: BioScience, 58(4) : 283

Published By: American Institute of Biological Sciences

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1641/B580401>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

PUBLISHER
Richard T. O'Grady

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Timothy M. Beardsley

SENIOR EDITOR
Donna Daniels Verdier

PRODUCTION MANAGER / ART DIRECTOR
Herman Marshall

**PEER REVIEW / EXTERNAL RELATIONS
COORDINATOR**
Jennifer A. Williams

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Laura C. Sullivan

Editors: Eye on Education: Brian Stagg (educationoffice@aibs.org); Feature articles: Cathy Lundmark (features@aibs.org); Washington Watch: Robert E. Gropp (publicpolicy@aibs.org).

Editorial Associate: Barbara J. Orton.

Editorial Board: Agriculture: Sonny Ramaswamy; Animal Behavior: Janice Moore; Animal Development: Paula Mabee; Botany: Kathleen Donohue; Cell Biology: Randy Wayne; Ecology: Scott Collins, Daniel Simberloff; Ecotoxicology: Judith S. Weis; Education: Gordon E. Uno; Environmental Policy: Gordon Brown, J. Michael Scott; Evolutionary Biology: James Mallet; Genetics and Evolution: Martin Tracey; History and Philosophy: Richard M. Burian; Invertebrate Biology: Kirk Fitzhugh; Landscape Ecology: Monica Turner; Microbiology: Edna S. Kaneshiro; Molecular Biology: David Hillis; Molecular Evolution and Genomics: David Rand; Neurobiology: Cole Gilbert; Plant Development: Cynthia S. Jones; Policy Forum: Eric A. Fischer; Population Biology: Ben Pierce; Professional Biologist: Jean Wyld; Sensing and Computation: Geoffrey M. Henebry; Statistics: Kent E. Holsinger; Vertebrate Biology: Harvey B. Lillywhite.

Editorial Correspondence: 1444 I Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005; telephone: 202-628-1500; fax: 202-628-1509; e-mail: bioscience@aibs.org. Instructions for preparing a manuscript for *BioScience* can be found at www.aibs.org/bioscience/resources/Info_for_contribs.pdf.

Advertising: For information on both display and line classified advertisements and deadlines, contact John Rasanen, American Geological Institute; telephone: 703-379-2480, ext. 224; fax: 703-379-7563; e-mail: jrasanen@aibs.org.

BioScience (ISSN 0006-3568) is published monthly except July/August combined by the American Institute of Biological Sciences. To subscribe, call 1-800-992-2427, ext. 29. Individual membership: sustaining, \$90/yr; individual, \$70/yr; family, \$90/yr (includes \$36 for *BioScience*); emeritus, \$50/yr; K-12 teacher/administrator, \$45/yr (includes \$22 for *BioScience*); graduate and postdoctoral students, \$40/yr (includes \$21 for *BioScience*); undergraduate and K-12 students, \$20/yr (includes \$15 for *BioScience*); lifetime, \$1400 (one-time fee). Institutional subscriptions: domestic, \$367/yr; foreign, \$440/yr. Single copies: \$14 plus shipping and handling for up to 20 copies; volume discounts available for more than 20 (call 1-800-992-2427, ext. 29). Subscription renewal month is shown in the four-digit year-month code in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

© 2008 American Institute of Biological Sciences. All rights reserved. Periodical postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *BioScience* Circulation, AIBS, 1313 Dolley Madison Blvd., Suite 402, McLean, VA 22101. Printed in USA. AIBS authorizes photocopying for internal or personal use, provided the appropriate fee is paid directly to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; telephone: 978-750-8400; fax: 978-750-4744; Web site: www.copyright.com.

To photocopy articles for classroom use, request authorization, subject to conditions thereof, from the Academic Permissions Service at CCC. Each copy must say "© [year] by the American Institute of Biological Sciences." Statements and opinions expressed in *BioScience* are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the editors, the publisher, or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated. The editors, publisher, and AIBS disclaim any responsibility or liability for such material.

BioScience

Organisms from Molecules to the Environment
American Institute of Biological Sciences

Let's Talk

Even as calls grow for a presidential debate on science and technology—see the Washington Watch column on p. 296—advocates of scientific realpolitik are warning the debate's champions (among which are *BioScience* and AIBS) to be careful what they wish for. A politically inspired boost in federal largesse for an agency can be used later to justify tight funding—a dubious net benefit, as David Goldston reminded his readers in *Nature* (7 February, p. 621). In any case, "More attention doesn't always translate into more money," Goldston noted, and as for concerns about scientific integrity in government, a debate under TV lights could easily leave the public "even more confused about how a president should use scientific advice." Daniel Sarewitz (who reviews a book on the commercialization of science on p. 360 of this issue of *BioScience*) wrote to *Nature* to argue that "science continues to enjoy a protected and privileged status in American politics, in no small part because of its absence from the national political stage."

The skeptics' points have some validity. Yes, ill-informed observers of a science debate might indeed leap to unfortunate opinions, and any watching scientists hoping for validation of their specialties, or for specific commitments to funding, would most likely be disappointed. But ill-informed observers of any debate risk being muddled rather than enlightened, and few scientists are so naive as to expect that presidential candidates would make commitments going beyond malleable generalities. Other considerations weigh more heavily in the debate's favor.

The value of such a debate would not be in its potential to elucidate differences between the candidates on delicate issues of scientific objectivity in policymaking. Nor could we expect the debate to extract pledges of funding beyond, perhaps, broad targets. Yet it could play an important role by rehearsing before a large audience one readily appreciated argument for basic research—its ability to spawn solutions to present and future problems, not to mention technologies that the public holds dear. Merely having research discussed in a context emphasizing its national importance would surely help science's image problem. Fears that such a public discussion could paradoxically undermine support for research seem overblown. In any event, for its long-term sustainability, science ought to justify itself openly, not just hope to escape attention.

A debate could also provide opportunities to ask candidates to justify some of the statements from their campaigns. Senator Clinton, who has put forward research-friendly proposals on science policy, could be asked to explain "evidence-based decisionmaking." Senator McCain might be invited to explain his ads that ridicule federally funded research on the size of grizzly bear populations, as reported in the *Washington Post*. If, as reported, his objection is to the manner of its funding, not the research itself, the senator will presumably be glad to correct the misimpression, and so demonstrate that wildlife biology is no joke. Senator Obama might be asked to clarify his thinking about basic research and its importance for combating climate change.

Granted, there's room for doubt about whether the candidates will see enough advantage to participate. But *BioScience* and AIBS still think a science debate would be useful—and fun.

TIMOTHY M. BEARDSLEY
Editor in Chief

doi:10.1641/B580401

Include this information when citing this material.

2008 Officers and Board of Directors

President

Rita R. Colwell
University of Maryland

President-Elect

May Berenbaum
University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign

Immediate Past-President

Douglas J. Futuyma
State University of New York

Secretary

Gordon Uno
(2008–2010)
University of Oklahoma

Treasurer

Richard B. Norgaard
(2007–2009)
University of California–
Berkeley

Board Members

Charles Berry
(2008–2010)
South Dakota State University

Carol Brewer
(2008–2010)
University of Montana

Ellen J. Censky
(2008–2010)
University of Oklahoma

Robert R. Christian
(2008)
East Carolina University

Louis J. Gross
(2008–2010)
University of Tennessee–
Knoxville

Eric S. Nagy
(2006–2008)
University of Virginia

Steward T. A. Pickett
(2007–2009)
Cary Institute of Ecosystem
Studies

Alan H. Savitzky
(2007–2009)
Old Dominion University

Richard T. O'Grady
(ex-officio)
AIBS Executive Director

To find out more about
AIBS and its member
societies and organizations,
go to www.aibs.org.

Member Societies and Organizations

- Academy of Natural Sciences
American Arachnological Society
American Bryological and Lichenological Society
American Fern Society
American Fisheries Society
American Malacological Society
American Mosquito Control Association
American Museum of Natural History
American Ornithologists' Union
American Phytopathological Society
American Public Garden Association
American Society for Gravitational and Space Biology
American Society for Photobiology
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
American Society of Limnology and Oceanography
American Society of Mammalogists
American Society of Naturalists
American Society of Parasitologists
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Society of Plant Taxonomists
American Type Culture Collection
Animal Behavior Society
Arkansas State University Department of Biological Sciences
Association for Politics and the Life Sciences
Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation
Association of College and University Biology Educators
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Association of Southeastern Biologists
Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum
Bell Museum of Natural History
Berkeley Natural History Museums
Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
BioQUEST Curriculum Consortium
Bishop Museum
Botanical Research Institute of Texas
Botanical Society of America
Brigham Young University
Brooklyn Botanic Garden
Burke Museum of Natural History
Cactus and Succulent Society of America
California Academy of Sciences
California Botanical Society
Carnegie Museum of Natural History
Cell Stress Society International
The Centennial Museum
Center for the Environment, Cornell University
Charles R. Connor Natural History Museum
Chicago Botanic Garden
Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Coastal Education and Research Foundation
Cooper Ornithological Society
Cornell University Department of Plant Biology
Council of Science Editors
Crop Science Society of America
Crowley Davis Research, Inc.
Delaware Museum of Natural History
Denver Museum of Nature and Science
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Entomological Society of Canada
Estuarine Research Federation
Field Museum
Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry
Florida Marine Research Institute
Florida Museum of Natural History
Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society
Friends of AIBS
Georgia Museum of Natural History
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology
Helmintological Society of Washington
Herpetologists' League
Human Anatomy and Physiology Society
Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation
Illinois Natural History Survey
Illinois State Museum
Instituto de Geología, UNAM
International Association for Bear Research and Management
International Association for Landscape Ecology, US Division
International Society for Ecological Modelling
International Society of Protistologists
Kansas (Central States) Entomological Society
Long Term Ecological Research Network
Lorain County Community College, Division of Science, Mathematics, and Distance Learning
Louisiana Museum of Natural Science
Louisiana State University Arthropod Museum
Louisiana State University Herbarium, Department of Biological Sciences
Miami University W. S. Turrell Herbarium
Michigan State University Museum
Milwaukee Public Museum
Mississippi Museum of Natural Science
Missouri Botanical Garden
Monte L. Bean Museum of Life Sciences
Morton Arboretum
Museum of Nature and Science
Museum of Southwestern Biology
Mycological Society of America
National Association of Biology Teachers
National Association of Marine Laboratories
National Evolutionary Synthesis Center
National Museum of Natural History
National Shellfisheries Association
National Tropical Botanical Garden
Natural Areas Association
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
Natural Science Collections Alliance
NatureServe
New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science
New Mexico State University, Center for Natural History Collections
New York Botanical Garden
New York State Museum
North American Benthological Society
North American Lake Management Society
North Carolina Botanical Garden
North Carolina Museum of Natural Science
North Carolina State University Insect Collection
Northwest Missouri State University, Biological Sciences
Occidental College, Moore Laboratory of Zoology
Ohio State University Museum of Biological Diversity
Ohio University Department of Environmental and Plant Biology
Oklahoma State University
Organization for Tropical Studies
Organization of Biological Field Stations
Orthopterists' Society
Paleontological Research Institution
Peabody Museum of Natural History
Phi Sigma Biological Sciences Honor Society
Phycological Society of America
Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management, Environmental Lands Division
Poultry Science Association
Purdue University Entomology Environmental Lab
R. M. Bohart Museum of Entomology
Radiation Research Society
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History
San Bernardino County Museum
San Diego Natural History Museum
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History
Sarah P. Duke Gardens
Science Museum of Minnesota
Slater Museum of Natural History
Society for Behavioral Neuroendocrinology
Society for Conservation Biology
Society for Economic Botany
Society for In Vitro Biology
Society for Industrial Microbiology
Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Society for Mathematical Biology
Society for Northwestern Vertebrate Biology
Society for Range Management
Society for Sedimentary Geology
Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles
Society for the Study of Evolution
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry
Society of Ethnobiology
Society of Nematologists
Society of Systematic Biologists
Society of Wetland Scientists
Soil Science Society of America
South Dakota State University, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences
Southern Appalachian Botanical Society
Southern California Academy of Sciences
Southwestern Association of Naturalists
Sternberg Museum of Natural History
Texas A&M University Department of Entomology
Texas A&M University Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences
Texas Memorial Museum
Texas Tech University Department of Biological Sciences
Tofino Botanical Gardens
Torrey Botanical Society
Tulane University Museum of Natural History
University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit
University of Alaska Museum of the North
University of California–Berkeley Department of Integrative Biology
University of California–San Diego, Scripps Institution of Oceanography
University of California–Santa Barbara Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration
University of Connecticut Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
University of Iowa Department of Geoscience
University of Kansas Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Institute
University of Michigan Genomic Diversity Laboratory
University of Michigan Museum of Zoology
University of Nebraska State Museum
University of Wisconsin Zoology Museum
US Bureau of Reclamation, Environmental Resource Management Division
US Federation for Culture Collections
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services and Fisheries Resource Office
US Society for Ecological Economics
Utah Museum of Natural History
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Virginia Museum of Natural History
Washington State University
Weed Science Society of America
Western Society of Naturalists
The Wildlife Society