

Mixing science and politics

May 30 2018

The inaugural March for Science, held last year in Washington, D.C., and other cities across the world, celebrated science and its role in our everyday lives. In addition, many participants expressed frustration with U.S. President Donald J. Trump's apparent disregard for evidence-based policy-making. An article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly news magazine of the American Chemical Society, reports that these concerns galvanized some scientists to run for political office.

In 2018, more than 60 researchers and technologists are campaigning for federal office, with hundreds more seeking local positions, according to the [science](#) advocacy group 314 Action. Rick Mullin, senior editor, notes that many of these candidates, largely Democrats, are dissatisfied with Trump's decisions and policies related to science, such as his withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, proposed budget cuts to federal science agencies and failure to nominate qualified individuals for key scientific posts. However, scientists, who have historically shunned public office, face campaign challenges, including a strain of science skepticism in the American public and better-funded, more charismatic opponents.

For scientists to succeed in politics, they must focus on influencing people, rather than on being right or wrong, Mullin writes. A candidate's approach varies with their constituency—scientists in highly educated, technology-driven districts face fewer challenges in communicating the importance of science than those in less educated, poverty-stricken areas. Some scientists are using their own research on public health issues such as cancer or nutrition to spark communication with voters.

Others tie scientific issues to local economic concerns. Only time will tell if their strategies resonate with voters in June primaries and November elections; however, their campaigns will likely help educate people about how science pertains to them.

More information: "Scientists hit the campaign trail,"
[cen.acs.org/policy/Scientists-...-ampaign-trail/96/i22](https://cen.acs.org/policy/Scientists-...-campaign-trail/96/i22)

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