

Science and Politics

There has been a phrase used often over the past 12 months during the declared state of emergency related to SARS-cov-2. The phrase, “this is about science, not politics” has been used repeatedly by politicians like California Governor Gavin Newsom and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo when referring to stay-at-home orders.¹ It has been used by President Joe Biden when referring to reopening schools and also by Mayor Tim Mahoney in Fargo.”^{2 3} When Mayor Mahoney, using emergency powers, issued a mask mandate on October 19th, 2020, he urged citizens to wear a mask because it is “about science, not politics.” He used the phrase again on March 22nd of this year when he allowed the mask mandate to expire citing lack of compliance, but only after releasing loose criteria that would allow him to reinstate the mandate at any time based on positivity rates if his emergency powers are allowed to continue.⁴

This argument of “science, not politics” is incredibly powerful. Why? Because we all believe in science. The process of asking questions, developing hypotheses, conducting experimentation, observation, analysis, and reporting is constant and ongoing, and should leave us with more questions than when we began. Broadly accepted scientific consensus arises out of a diversity of thought, rigorous experimentation, and time-tested, repeatable results. Using the guise of a supposed scientific

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/14/us/us-coronavirus-reopening-tuesday/index.html>

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/13/833662246/states-unite-on-reopening-economies-science-not-politics-will-guide-decisions>

⁴ <https://fargond.gov/news-events/city-news-room/post-detail?id=5f8e107c7e4a9efb760f8f49>

consensus to rationalize sweeping societal change is dangerous for public trust in both science and government.

In January of this year, Italian Physicist Carlo Rovelli wrote the following:

“I write this because I see a danger: that politics hides behind science to justify its choices... Science should be listened-to, by the governments, but it should not be a screen behind which to hide, to justify hard-to-make decisions. The risk is that a part of society would then blame science, and lose confidence in government, when disagreeing with the choices made.

“History is full of very bad choices made by governments, taken under the cover of science. From the experimentation of psychedelic drugs on unwitting test subjects conducted by US government agencies in the 1950s all the way to the racial policies of the Nazis, examples abound. Even without referring to these extreme examples, it suffices to remember how often scientific economic theories have been used by governments to justify economic policies that actually favour only one part of the society: an open government should never hide behind science to cover true motives of some choices.”⁵

Public health policies, based on selective science, have been used over the past 12 months as a political tool to erode Americans’ most basic rights, several of which are enumerated in the First Amendment: freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion. Stay-at-home orders, the closing of schools and churches, censorship of critics, the isolation of the elderly,

⁵ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41563-020-00891-3>

mandating of masks, and mass vaccination have all been implemented by politicians under the guise of scientific consensus while many vocal, opposing expert opinions are ignored. In spite of what we were told last summer and fall, one mask is now no longer enough.

Trust in science comes from a consistent, measured, and repeatable approach. Trust in government comes from the consent of the governed. Both require freedom and a diversity of thought and ideas. Free societies find ways to balance safety with civil liberties, and mandates generally fall short of accomplishing either goal.

Please vote in favor of HB 1323.