THIS WEEK

Fight for the facts

Scientists must join others in standing their ground against a US leader who is anything but conventional.

On 21 January, one day after the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States, millions of people took to the streets in protests across the country and around the world. The marches were spurred by Trump's treatment of women, but the focus expanded to include issues ranging from apparent hostility towards environmental regulations to disregard for the truth. Many hoped that the sobering reality of entering the White House would transform Trump's approach into something more conventionally presidential, but the early signs are not promising.

Trump's inauguration speech was heavy on populist and nationalist rhetoric that, if carried out, would probably herald the end the United States' leadership abroad. At home, he has put a freeze on hiring across the federal government, excluding the military and any positions related to national security and public safety. He also reiterated his plans to freeze regulations set in motion by his predecessor and to roll back pro-environment policies already in place.

Trump threw a bone to scientists with a pledge to explore space and to battle disease, but one of the first documents posted on the White House website was a bare-bones energy plan that emphasizes fossil-fuel development and makes no mention of the threat of climate change (see page 443). The plan takes aim at "burdensome" environmental regulations and says that the Environmental Protection Agency should focus on protecting air and water, as opposed to the climate. Although it mentions — but does not define — "clean coal technology", the plan ignores the struggling nuclear-energy sector as well as a burgeoning renewables industry that could provide countless jobs across the country in the coming decades.

In short, the energy plan is a product of cynicism and greed. Even fossil-fuel executives must recognize it as such. This would include former ExxonMobil chief Rex Tillerson, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, whose appointment is headed for approval by the full Senate after a party-line 11–10 vote by the Committee on Foreign Relations on 23 January.

If there's a sliver of good news, it's that Trump's nominees are afraid to openly impugn the science underlying global warming. In fact, Tillerson affirmed during his confirmation hearing on 11 January that climate change is real and needs to be dealt with, ideally by placing a tax on carbon. When pressed by Democratic senators last week, former Texas governor Rick Perry and Oklahoma attorney-general Scott Pruitt both affirmed the reality of global warming. Unfortunately, none seemed eager to seek a solution.

Rejecting mainstream science has become a theme for Trump. The president has met with two scientists over the past couple of weeks: David Gelernter, a computer scientist at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and a vocal critic of liberal academia; and William Happer, a physicist at Princeton University in New Jersey who believes that carbon dioxide emissions are beneficial. Those meetings have spurred speculation that Trump is interviewing people for the post of chief science adviser, but it's not clear that either would have the ability — or the desire — to tap into the deep ranks of researchers and synthesize science for a sitting president.

The question remains of just how much Trump cares about that. On his first full day as president, Trump told officials at the CIA that he "very strongly believes in academics". But his early statements as president demonstrate, once again, a worrying disregard for evidence — particularly when it contradicts his claims. At the CIA, he accused the media of lying about the crowd size during his inauguration, and of manufacturing his public dispute with US intelligence agencies over findings of Russian interference in the US election. Both assertions were demonstrably false, as was his statement that the rain stopped during his speech.

"Rejecting mainstream science has become a theme for Trump."

Within two days of Trump assuming power, White House officials have found themselves embroiled in a scandal over "alternative facts". These are unique assets that the Trump administration now claims to have at its disposal. The stance is not surprising given Trump's long-standing disregard for the truth, but it is nonetheless disturbing to behold. One of the signs carried by protestors at the weekend sets a challenge for those who believe that politicians must confront the world as it is, rather than how they would like it to be: "Make America think again." ■

Slow progress

The gender imbalance in scientific publishing is still pervasive — not least in Nature.

In 2012, this journal admitted its gender bias. Following a complaint from two readers that too few News & Views articles were written by women, we totted up the numbers and realized that they were correct. Moreover, the imbalance was present in other sections of *Nature*, too. At the time, we pledged to commission more female scientists as reviewers and writers by asking editors to explicitly consider them, and to report back on progress (*Nature* **491,** 495; 2012). We did so in 2013 and the results were mixed. There was progress, but it was patchy and we conceded that we needed to keep trying, and to try harder (*Nature* **504,** 188; 2013).

It is time for another update, not least because the issue of gender imbalance in scientific publishing is the subject of a Comment piece this week (see page 455). The authors analyse data from the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and find that female