
A Town Hall for Science

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If you've attended or heard about a New England town meeting, you'll have a good idea of what the Opinion section in *The Scientist* is all about. In these pages you'll find an open forum for addressing the members of your community — the scientific community — on the issues of the day.

In letters to the editor and in opinion articles by scientists and by policy-makers in science, these pages will resound with high-energy debate between professionals. Their opinions — informed, closely considered, imbued with knowledge formed by experience — will range over a diversity of subjects affecting the world of science.

Your Opinion

We invite you to bring us your viewpoints and concerns about the practice of science in the university, in industry, and in government. Send us your opinions on the subjects you care about, those that you believe cry out for discussion. We will continue to invite the contribution of a particular scientist or other expert, but it is chiefly you, the reader, who will shape the discussions found in *The Scientist*.

Never mind that your opinion is held by a minority. Today's con-

troversial stand frequently becomes tomorrow's conventional understanding. Even if you agree with a published position, write us; often-times it is not so much the novelty of our beliefs that matters but rather the way we express them. We ask only that your views be well reasoned.

And remember, too, the necessity of such exchange. The opinions of scientists are becoming increasingly important as advances outdistance our understanding of their implications. Scientists, science policy-makers, and the public must discuss issues and make choices or we will all reach conclusions that we have not considered and have not prepared for.

"Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions," observed the poet John Milton, "for opinion is but knowledge in the making." The Opinion pages of *The Scientist* constitute a new arena for "knowledge in the making," knowledge not only of what we will do with our discoveries, but also of where and how we will pursue new discoveries. Debate and discussion signal the vitality of our endeavors. We should fear only indifference.

In the pages of *The Scientist* we have built a town hall for the community of science. You are invited

to come forward and tell your colleagues how you view the issues of the day.

My Opinion

Ever since I planned this newspaper and my own editorial contributions to it, colleagues have urged me to voice my opinion on a variety of contemporary issues — indeed, about anything that strikes my fancy. They argue that, unlike my weekly essays in *Current Contents*, the ideas I express in this column need not be inhibited by my balancing the various viewpoints and supplying careful documentation.

The more bizarre my opinions, some have said, the less the likelihood that there will be precedent for them. If nothing else, these opinions might provoke readers to express their own views. Such a mandate, it seems to me,

amounts to a license to kill. I fear the potential for literary murder, or, more to the point, literary suicide! Besides, it's not my style.

The truth of the matter is this: while I write about many subjects, I have strong opinions about few. I research and write about topics that interest me because I really don't know what to think about them. Of course, I'll express my views on certain issues. But you are likely to read as many observations as opinions in this column, for it seems that the more I learn, the less sure I am about many matters.

Controversial issues are invariably complex; they defy simple solutions. Nevertheless, I am privileged to hold a unique vantage point on the panorama of science today. I invite you to join me in observing, as well as in debating, its development. ■