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Truth and the Public Good. What To Do When There Is No Bottom To Science Denial

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In this talk I will discuss the current state of relations between Physics (and Science in general) and the non-scientific public. After many years as both a practicing astrophysicist and a science writer/communicator, I have watched as the public perception of science has changed dramatically. Because of critical issues such as climate change, a remarkably large section of the public views science as tainted by "elite" interests rather than as a means of achieving some degree of truth about the physical world. The recent experience with the political polarization of science in the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these trends. In this talk I will review how this state of affairs came to be, using my own experiences in writing for venues like NPR, The New York Times and elsewhere. The current situation presents profound challenges to our community and to the US scientific effort as a whole. I will attempt to articulate some of the causes of this situation. In addition I will explore mechanisms through which we can ensure that science maintains its vital role ensuring the health, welfare and security of the US and global communities.