

Cuts to science hurt Cañon City residents

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My time in Cañon started me on a path which led to the forefront of science. But this path and the research that benefits our community is collapsing.

I was seven when I first saw the dinosaur tracks on Skyline Drive. Momentarily distracted from rock scrambling, I stood stunned at the unmistakable imprint of giant footprints. A real-life dinosaur walked over that exact spot. The sediment hardened, sank, and then lifted with Skyline Ridge – revealing a rocky time capsule from an alien past. I was awed that this special place in Cañon’s backyard could help humans uncover our ancient history.

Today, I study fossils made of galaxies. Physics in the early universe left imprints in the patterns of galaxies over massive distances. I measure these patterns to understand what the cosmos is made of and how it changes. This tells us about dark energy, the mysterious force driving the expansion of the Universe. Recent results from my collaboration, the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, hint that [dark energy is evolving](#). This is one of the biggest physics results of the decade and a major clue in our search to understand a fundamental, powerful force that surrounds us.

I began my science journey in Cañon City, encouraged by excellent teachers and mentors. The University of Colorado, Boulder was the next step. While here, I brought science back to CCHS by organizing [a visit from CU students](#) to teach science classes for a day. I wanted to become a scientist, but I needed research experience to get into graduate school. Fortunately, the National Science Foundation (NSF) offered me a spot in a program which gave students from rural areas the opportunity to do research at any US university. That program paved the way for my admission to the PhD program at Harvard University, where I was supported by more NSF funding and funding from the Department of Energy.

At Harvard I made friends with students from all over the world. I was proud to be from the country that recruited the most international talent and led the world in scientific research. Unfortunately, that reputation has collapsed in the past few months. My peers are leaving the country and the NSF programs which enabled my career have been cancelled. Children in Cañon have the potential to contribute to world-changing scientific research, but their opportunities are disappearing. **If I was a student at CCHS now, I could not have become the scientist I am today.**

The Trump administration’s cuts to federal science are unprecedented and extend to all fields. These include fields like [geology](#), [ecology](#), and [paleontology](#) that Cañon City uniquely benefits from through environmental preservation and tourism. Even space science is

critical to our safety, as drought and fire monitoring rely on satellite data. Additionally, billions have been cut from the National Institute of Health (NIH), halting life-saving research in cancer, diabetes, dementia, Parkinson's, and more.

The explanation given for these cuts is to save taxpayer money. However, science is recognized by both [Democrats and Republicans](#) as having an incredible return on investment. NIH funding alone provides [over a 250% return](#) on investment to the economy. The long-term returns of basic research include technologies that become essential to daily life, such as computers, cell phones, energy production, and medicine. Scientific research also provides jobs, educates the public, informs good policy-making, and is a cornerstone of America's global leadership. The government isn't "subsidizing" researchers and universities – it's paying for services performed by overworked researchers who could make twice as much in private industries. We take pay cuts because we care more about the value our work produces for society. **Cancelling science funding doesn't save you money, it destroys your valuable investments.**

The pathways that allow any American to become a scientist are being destroyed, all federal research funds to my university have been cut, and scientific programs in every field are being carelessly slashed in an unprecedented presidential overreach. It will take decades for American science to recover, and a deeper attack is on the way with the president's current budget request. The most effective defense we have is democracy. Tell our representatives that we are paying attention and urge them to reject these catastrophic cuts to scientific research. Everyone loses when science suffers.

Our congressional representative, Brittany Pettersen, can be contacted at pettersen.house.gov/contact. To show your support for articles like this one, you can sign the Citizens for Science Pledge at tiny.cc/sciencepledge.