The Larry Meiller Show
Tuesday, June 2, 2026

Larry Meiller: Great to have you with us on WPR News. Larry Meiller here, and we begin the show today with the first hour of science, science literacy. There's all kinds of things. There's really an interesting report I think that Bassam Shakhashiri's going to give us on sulfuric acid and why there are some problems associated with it, which I did not know about, and I'm going to be really eager to hear what he's got to say. Bassam Shakhashiri, of course, back with us, emeritus professor of chemistry at UW–Madison, a national proponent for science and science education. And as I said, lots of news regarding greenhouse gases, the sulfuric acid. We can take a look at science literacy with him, and I hope you'll join in with your questions. How important is science education in the US in your mind? What problems do you see in the science area? Give us a call. The number 1-800-642-1234. It's 1-800-642-1234, or send an email to talk@wpr.org. Love to hear from you. And Bassam Shakhashiri, welcome back. Good to have you with us.

Bassam Shakhashiri: Always, always happy to be with you and the listening audience, Larry. Thank you.

Larry Meiller: Let's start with science literacy. We've talked—you've talked a lot about the importance of science literacy and how important it is for the general public, I guess, to appreciate the contribution of science in our daily lives. What's your view of the state of science literacy in the country?

Bassam Shakhashiri: Science literacy in the country is—is fairly good, but frankly, not good enough, Larry. Society increasingly depends on science and technology. And this is why it's essential for the well-being of everyone in our society, all communities, all members of society, to develop an appreciation of science, what the benefits of technology are, and also the potential risks associated with these advances. So, what is the level of appreciation, what is the level of understanding of these tremendous advances in science and technology that we enjoy now? That is something that is really potentially troubling because I don't feel that there is enough, there is sufficient appreciation of the role of science and technology in our well-being. You know I'm an advocate of having widespread science literacy. Science and technology, Larry, are the engines that drive our economy, and they contribute to our well-being. Science literacy is an attitude. It's like personal hygiene; you have to work at it, you have to be engaged in it, you have to be involved, you have to ask questions, you have to converse. And if the scientists don't come around to telling you what they're doing and how important it is what they're doing, we should be asking them. It's not only the responsibility of scientists to engage in conversations about science literacy; it is the responsibility of everyone to ask scientists, not only about their

own research, but about the general well-being of society as it relates to advances in science and technology. I want to say one more time: science literacy is an attitude. It's like personal hygiene, as I said. You just do it. You live it. And you engage in meaningful, respectful conversations. So, the state of science literacy in the country is in need of much, much improvement, and it is the responsibility of those of us in science and technology to do more. It is also the responsibility of everyone else to engage us by asking us to explain, to share, to discuss, to review, to evaluate the benefits and the potential harm that could arise from advances in science and technology.

Larry Meiller: I know you oversee the Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy. Well, maybe you could talk about what that organization is doing now.

Bassam Shakhashiri: The Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy, housed at UW–Madison, is basically my research and public engagement group. It started out in the chemistry department a long time ago, and it's expanded to include conversations about science, conversations about technology, and to promote literacy in science, mathematics, and technology with a dual purpose. One is to have these conversations, and the second purpose is to attract future generations to careers in research, in teaching, and in public service. I want to emphasize careers in doing research, in teaching, and also in being engaged with the public. What we do at the Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy is we live our philosophy by engaging individuals and groups, both locally, around the state, across the country, around the world, actually. The main purpose is to trigger cerebral and emotional connections that really heighten the joy of learning. But more importantly is the action that we each take after what we learn. So, basically, this is, briefly and succinctly, what the Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy is all about.

Larry Meiller: How many times have I seen you with that T-shirt "Science is Fun"? That philosophy, you've been trying to spread that philosophy for your whole career.

Bassam Shakhashiri: Well, the joy of learning is not only satisfying personally, but it is related to how I and others interact with each other. And when we say science is fun, well, I'm not talking about cheap thrills. I'm talking about being intellectually stimulated and being emotionally rewarded. And I'm talking about engagement, conversations, respectful conversations. The joy of learning is personal, but it is also a community, it's also related to our interactions with the community. So, yes, fun in the best sense of the word. You can't be serious unless you have fun, you know that. [laughs]

Larry Meiller: [laughs] Well, you know, here we are at the end of a school year, and— of course, and I know there are many students graduating in chemistry and the sciences. What do you think the job market for college graduates with science degrees is right now?

Bassam Shakhashiri: The job market is not so bad, but it can be better. There are concerns in terms of how advances in technology, specifically artificial intelligence, is affecting the market, the employment market. So, people with a bachelor's degree, master's degrees, PhD degrees continue to be sought by industry. But there are concerns about how some of the functions, about the role that they would play when they're employed in industry. So, that's something to really, really be concerned about. As far as academic institutions' employment, we know that the population profile is changing, and who knows what the need is going to be in the next 5 to 10 years for teachers, for college professors, for university researchers. But that should not deter us from insisting on having high-quality offerings in our schools, colleges, and universities to prepare us either for a technical career or for careers where we appreciate and try to understand the significant roles of science and technology in what we do. I remain optimistic.

Larry Meiller: [laughs] Well, and as I've been reading, there has been, you know, issues in terms of research and that sort of thing at the university and, you know, that level, but in the private level, there's been a bit of an uptick in certain science fields where the opportunities are expanding a bit.

Bassam Shakhashiri: Yes, and they're expanding because we know more as a result of scientific research, and we have ways to apply what we have learned for the benefit of society. Yes, that's true.

Larry Meiller: Nick in Green Bay has a comment or cell for us. Let's go there. Nick, hi, thanks for calling.

Nick: Hey Larry, and love your guest. Your guest is an amazing guy. I got three kids, and I'm into science huge. I'm a ham operator, and I try to get the kids to talk on shortwave. They've got no interest. I said, "Well, we could talk to the space station going across." No, no interest at all, and it really disappoints me because, you know, science is amazing, but they've just got no interest. And I'm very enthusiastic about science, and they just could care less. It's a real bummer, and, you know, there's nothing I can do. You can bring the horse to water, but you just can't make them drink, and it's just really upsets me, but—

Bassam Shakhashiri: Well, wait, Nick, let me interrupt you. What are they interested in? Have you engaged in conversations with them about their own interest and try to have an understanding of what they're interested in and maybe you can successfully and correctly point out that whatever they're interested in has deep connections and relations to science and technology?

Nick: They're interested in sports, lots of sports.

Bassam Shakhashiri: How about the science of sports? Is nutrition important for someone to do well in sports? Is exercise important? Is getting enough sleep important? We have lots of research that continues to go on in all of these three areas I just mentioned. There are many more. And they're all scientific-based, and they help us understand how to enjoy sports, and help us understand how we do things together when we go to a ballgame or when we play, and how to be protective of ourselves as we do a sports activity. You know, enough sleep, enough nutrition, proper rest, not overdo the exercise, what to do if there's an injury. All of this is related to advances in science, Nick.

Larry Meiller: And I would just add to that, if they're mathematically inclined, some of the better-paying jobs in baseball, for example, at the managerial level—or at the higher levels—is the statistics that are being processed on every player, and under what conditions they might hit better, or pitching, what kinds of pitches. There are all kinds of mathematical equations going on here to figure out every last move that a player makes.

Bassam Shakhashiri: Excellent point, Larry, because mathematical literacy is part of what I'm talking about, science literacy. It's easy for people to look up the batting average of a player. That's statistics. And how does that happen? And what does it mean? And how are they collected? How are they processed? And now, with advances in technology, we have many more pieces of data. One question I have is, what do we do with all these pieces of data? So, there's all kinds of ways to talk about this and to learn from it.

Larry Meiller: Nick, I hope you do that. I hope you take some time and think about that, your kids' interests and what kind of a science spin can you put on it. You have some examples to work from here, and appreciate your call very much. Always good talking with you. Bassam Shakhashiri, our guest today, emeritus professor of chemistry at UW–Madison and the William T. Evjue Distinguished Chair for the Wisconsin Idea. What are your thoughts on science and science education? Other questions for Bassam, give a call. The number 800-642-1234, or if you'd like, you could email us to talk@wpr.org. I'm Larry Meiller for WPR News. Science and science education on our minds today as we talk with Bassam Shakhashiri, emeritus professor of chemistry at UW–Madison. It's great to have him back. Questions for him or a comment to share, I hope you'll join in. The number 800-642-1234, or email to talk@wpr.org. Bassam, I mentioned at the start of the show sulfuric acid. [laughs] The price of gasoline has spiked since the US war in Iran, but there is another product that's now harder to get from that part of the world, and that's sulfuric acid. Now, why would that be a problem?

Bassam Shakhashiri: Sulfuric acid is a critical component of the gross domestic product because sulfuric acid is the most used chemical in all the processes that we have in society. Sulfuric acid, the chemical formula for it is H_2SO_4. It is a strong acid in water. It is

made by combining sulfur, the element sulfur, with oxygen to make sulfur dioxide and sulfur trioxide, and then it's the sulfur trioxide when it is combined with water that produces the the sulfuric acid. So, the disruption in the supply of sulfuric acid, as I said, it's the world's most common chemical. The disruption in the supply has consequences. These consequences, I'll just give you a couple. There are higher fertilizer costs now. They're triggered because less sulfuric acid is being produced. Why is it being less produced? Because the world's supply of sulfur and sulfuric acid goes through the Strait of Hormuz.

Larry Meiller: Mhm.

Basam Shakhashiri: It is important that we continue to have a good supply worldwide of sulfuric acid. It cuts across agricultural sector, there you go, agricultural sector in society. When fertilizer prices go up, which is what is happening because there's less fertilizer being produced, less fertilizer being produced because there's less sulfuric acid available, then the farmers are forced to reduce the amount of fertilizer they put on the fields, and because when that happens, then you have lower crop yields. That is especially true for grains like corn, rice, and wheat that are very highly dependent on manufactured fertilizers, including, you know, especially the ones that have ammonia. So, reducing the amount of fertilizer available worldwide even by a small fraction, it significantly reduces the harvest, the size of the harvest. And then there's less food potentially, less food available for all of us. There are other effects, too. Farmers sometimes they switch crops. And when you switch crops, you need different varieties of nutrients, and all of these are, you know, based on manufactured chemicals that have to do with sulfuric acid.

Larry Meiller: That's one good example. And it's going to affect those parts of the world or those areas of, even I guess, some areas of the US where lower-income folks are going to have the highest set of problems.

Basam Shakhashiri: Yes. And that sulfuric acid is the most commonly used chemical in the world in all of the processes that affect manufacturing, agriculture, and so on.

Larry Meiller: Jim in Onlaska has something for us. Let's go there. Jim, hi. Thanks for calling. What's on your mind?

Jim: Hi, thank you. I think science students should also have a heavy dose of political science because you can be the greatest scientist, but if you don't know how our politics work, you're not real effective.

Larry Meiller: Huh. So, political science. I would say communications, too, as a faculty member from the Department of Life Sciences Communication, I would say that as well.

Basam Shakhashiri: Yeah, so critical to become educated. To develop skills to learn, but also skills to relate to others. And communication is a form of relating to others. And all communications have to be encouraged, they have to be improved, they have to be practiced, and they have to be done. I wonder if you would make this suggestion to your local school board. We should engage with our local school boards, we should engage with the Departments of Public Instruction, not only in Wisconsin but across the listening area to see to it that we have high-quality educational offerings that prepare our students to live not only well, but to live well with each other, and that is the essence of communication, is how we live and interact with each other. And I want to say one more time, Larry, all the interactions we have with each other should be respectful, should be based on trust, and should be based on confidence in what we say. Not that we are trying to tell everybody to behave in a certain way, except that our behavior should be inviting to others, so we listen to each other, we talk with each other, not talk at each other. And if we have differences of opinion, fine. Let's air them, let's discuss them. We need to be respectful, and we need to be trusting in ourselves and in others so that we have good conversations. And as I've said on your program before, Larry, and I say it all the time, the first purpose of a conversation is to have another conversation.

Larry Meiller: You do say that. And you know, just to add to Jim's point on political science, I when I was in high school, even in grade school, I had but in high school I had a pretty good civics class. And I've read recently, kind of to my dismay, that civics is being less offered in schools these days. And understanding your government and how things function, in my mind, is important for an informed society.

Basam Shakhashiri: It is. And we should be concerned about the quality of teaching in our high schools and at our colleges and universities. Of the sciences, of mathematics, but also of the arts and other parts of the humanities. Because science is not the answer to all the questions that we have as human beings. We need to engage in really effective ways to live with each other, not only exist with each other, but to live with each other. That's so crucial, especially nowadays that the discourse is at a level which is less than civil. And in that regard, I also want to say something about social media. So, social media can be put to good use, but excessive dependence on social media can result in less, on the part of the user, less paying attention to what's important. If you look at so many different things in a short period of time, in a minute or five minutes, and you go on for hours, what is it that you remember? What action are you going to take other than keep on scrolling? So, we need we need to really be sure not only about what goes on in the in the school, in the classroom, but what we do individually as we enjoy the beautiful world that we live in, and we contribute to the well-being of everyone in our society.

Larry Meiller: Mhm. Carol emailed to say that a good example of interesting science for people of all ages can be found in the YouTube show "Huge If True." It's hosted by journalist Cleo Abrams. And I know that it, kind of rather than what's going wrong with the world, the show takes sort of an optimistic approach, kind of breaks down complex cutting-edge topics like artificial intelligence or genetic engineering and sustainable energy into, I guess you could say, highly accessible and highly polished, highly produced stories.

Basam Shakhashiri: There are many good examples like the one you mentioned, the caller mentioned, that Carol mentioned. And then there's Nova, there are programs on PBS Wisconsin not only for kids, PBS Wisconsin Kids, and for adults. And Larry, your show over the decades has always dealt with topics and matters related to science. I don't want to go through the whole list, but whether it's people from the health sector, or people from agriculture, people from in every sector. I'm not going to go through the whole thing. Garden Talk, Calling All Pets, I really salute you, Larry, for having such a wide variety of guests that enrich us as we listen to you and to the guests. And you've had lots of science and technology programs. Thank you, Larry.

Larry Meiller: Oh well, thank you, Bassam. I appreciate that very much. And I'll be gone end of June, but the shows and the topics we cover are not going to change. We're going to keep that going and I'm hoping for many many years to come, for sure. Dennis in Stoughton, had a kind of a question for you. He couldn't stay with us, but he quoted Carl Sagan as saying, "We're all made of star stuff." And Dennis asked to what extent is that true? How did the element involved and precipitate out of the universe? Although that's a simple question, I'm sure you can answer it.

Basam Shakhashiri: Well, that's a good way to start a conversation, and thank you, Dennis, for this question. Yes, you know, there was also a song not too long ago, right? Maybe some decades ago, "Dust in the Wind," right? Wasn't it? You remember that? "All we are is dust in the wind" or something like that. That gives me a pause to think and to contemplate the meaning of life and what we are doing here on the surface of the planet and how privileged we are to be alive and how we can interact with each other, learn from each other, and help each other, and live with each other, not just exist, but live with each other. So, you see one simple statement like that can lead to all kinds of other conversations.

Larry Meiller: Michelle has another conversation point. She was noting that some scientific studies note that for humans to live at sustainable levels without degrading our resources, our Earth's resources, the population shouldn't exceed 2.5 billion people, but currently the population is over 8 billion and is projected to reach 10 to 12 billion. And

Michelle said she doesn't hear many scientists talking about that this. Do you advise scientists to address the problem of growth?

Basam Shakhashiri: I do, indeed. This is the survival of the planet and the quality of life on the planet are essential parts of conversations we should have. And yes, scientists don't talk with the public enough about this, and the public should be asking, just like Michelle is doing now. You should be asking the local high school teacher, you should be asking the college professors, you should be asking people who have programs on social media these kinds of questions, and as I keep saying, engage in respectful conversations. Respecting each other as fellow human beings. Not necessarily respecting what someone is saying, or what someone's ideology is, but respecting ourselves and each other so that we can really enjoy the benefits of the planet that we live on. And what we do should be for the benefit of the planet and its inhabitants. Not just people, but all the inhabitants of the of the planet. And Larry, I should have mentioned this before. I invite everyone to visit my website where we have a variety of topics related to what we've been talking about, scifun.org. We have a rich display of material related to global warming, related to science, the arts, and the humanities. We also have, if you click in the upper left corner of the home page, experiments you can do at home. Download them and do them. They're all safe to do, otherwise we wouldn't post them. They've all been reviewed, they've been vetted, so I invite everyone to visit the Science is Fun website, scifun.org. And if you have suggestions for us for new topics to put or for improvements of what we have put, please let us know. Scifun.org, you're all welcome.

Larry Meiller: It's a great site, it really is. I've been there many, many times. You know, this talk about communication and working together reminds me that in late July, I believe it is, UW-Madison is going to be hosting the 2026 Biennial Conference on Chemical Education. And that's kind of a big deal.

Basam Shakhashiri: It is a big deal. Because it will be the largest gathering of chemistry educators in the world coming to Madison July 26th to July 30th for a conference. It's the first time the conference comes back to Madison in 50 years. This will be the 29th Biennial Conference of the American Chemical Society Chemical Education Group in Madison. In 1976 we had the conference here. It was the fourth Biennial Conference. It was hosted by UW-Madison. And it was a foundational and transformative conference. It offered innovative programming, connecting basic research in chemistry and in educational pedagogy with faculty and teachers at all levels. And 50 years later, the conference comes back to Madison. It shines a bright light on what UW-Madison's commitment to advancing knowledge and to serving society is. And Larry, I have to say I was the chair of the conference in 1976.

Larry Meiller: [laughter] Yeah.

Basam Shakhashiri: So here I am 50 years later enjoying not only what the results of that conference was, but looking forward to what the attendees, the speakers, and the participants are going to do in chemistry education in the next decade. I'm forward-looking. I want to celebrate the past, of course, but I want to be focused on immediate concerns and challenges and opportunities that we have in teaching science, in this case chemistry.

Larry Meiller: And it is at all levels. I mean, there are high school, I'm not sure about grade school. Maybe there are grade school teachers.

Basam Shakhashiri: Well yes there are, at all educational levels. And on Sunday, the first day, July 26th, there is a symposium, the topic of it is looking forward, and it's open to the public. You don't have to pay the registration fee. It will be held at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, on campus. There are actually two other symposia recognizing chemistry people from UW-Madison who have done well. Both of them, Cathy Middlecamp and John Moore, were at the 1976 conference. Since they have made tremendous contributions and there's so many other. They have a symposium for Cathy and for John as well. They're open to the public, there's no charge for attending. And there's a commercial exhibit, all kinds of different things happening. Everyone is invited to come.

Larry Meiller: How do they do that? Do you go to scifun.org, or is there another way that people can click in to take part?

Basam Shakhashiri: Yes, they go to Biennial Conference on Chemical Education 2026. I will also post it on my website, scifun.org. But Biennial Conference on Chemical Education, B-C-C-E 2026. And you'll find out a lot more maybe than you want to know, but it's all there.

Larry Meiller: Basam Shakhashiri, our guest today. Great to have him with us as we talk science and science education. Questions or comments or maybe an experience to share, I hope you'll join in. The number's 800-642-1234 or email us to talk@wpr.org. I'm Larry Meiller for WPR News.

Talking science and science education today with Basam Shakhashiri. Just to let you know coming up at the top of the hour we're certainly maintaining science as we talk about the space debris that's falling. Some of it's burning up, but a lot of it isn't. A UW-Stout professor Matthew Ray will be joining us to talk about research going on there to actually figure out ways to make that material that isn't burning up actually burn up before it hits the earth. That’s a cool thing we'll be talking about at noon today and then at 12:30 we'll be having an open line. You can give me your ideas for future shows. Looking forward to all that. In the meantime, we've got Greg in Sanor with a question, I believe, relating to science. Greg, hello.

Greg (Caller): Hello, Larry. More of a comment than a question. Just the fellow that called in about, you know, the ham radio operator and the kids not really interested in, you know, we old fogies got some old fogie kind of hobbies and or, you know, lifestyles or careers. So, what I guess what I'm trying to say is the kids the last 30 years of my career, all I heard, I talked to people around the country every day, and all I seemed to hear was "the kids don't want to work these days. They just don't want to work," you know? I have to disagree with that so much because the new technology, the new science that's out there, these kids these kids that are 15, 18 years old now, they're so smart it's unbelievable. And you look at the jobs, they don't want to work in grandpa's motor shop and be all full of grease anymore. The kids that are out there, the really smart that have had their share of science and physics and chemistry and all that stuff, the jobs, for instance, that you just talked about or the next hour you talked about space. Almost like if it was 1880 and the railroads were coming into our country, the brand new railroads. Kids wanted to work on the railroads. Well, now space is being commercialized, and you look at some of these companies that are doing this stuff, the aerospace companies that we have in our country, and the jobs in their websites are just fantastic jobs for kids with masters or even bachelors degrees, you know, they can get into a company and start in a scientific type job and before you know it, 30 years, they're on top of the world with the commercialization of space. I can't wait to hear the next hour now with the the space junk falling.

Larry Meiller: Well, Greg, thanks a lot.

Basam Shakhashiri: Fantastic what Greg is saying. Yes, there are so many opportunities and the level of intelligence we have in society is widespread and we just have to find the right opportunities to pursue. And if someone is not interested in one thing, they're interested in something else. And maybe with the proper conversations at home, at the dinner table, out in the yard, also in school, in the classroom, we can try to help satisfy the curiosity that we all have. We're all curious. That's one of the lead-in statements of this program, curiosity. We all want to know and should expect our institutions, the schools, our community institutions, our religious groups to really encourage and help us transform to live in the 21st century and to try to take advantage of so many ways in which we can not only learn, we can contribute. It is essential for the well-being of society to become literate in science, to appreciate science, and to try to understand more about science. That's the mission of the Initiative for Science Literacy. That should be the mission of everyone who is involved in meaningful activities in the world. And as I said, having said all this, as I said before, science is not the answer to all the questions that we have. So we should learn about the important role of science, and for those of us who want to be practitioners of science, we should be very good at it. We should develop skills to do it. But skills are not enough. We have to be taking responsible action to use those skills for the benefit of

society. I like what Greg said. And yes, there are opportunities at different times in anyone's life where we get motivated, inspired, we change our mind change about doing this, about doing that. But it is so fulfilling and so meaningful to engage in trying to satisfy our curiosity. And that is going to greatly influence the support that we get from society. So all the financial cuts that are happening now for supporting basic research and education we have to try to change that. Why should we change it? If you don't believe and act according to what you want, then it just becomes indifference. I think indifference is our enemy. We should take responsibility for what we think, for what we talk about, for our actions. And it's all for the common good of society.

Larry Meiller: Bassam, you and I have been doing this show together for a long time. I don't even know how many shows we've done together.

Basam Shakhashiri: I do. I do.

Larry Meiller: You do? You got a number?

Basam Shakhashiri: It's almost 200 times.

Larry Meiller: Wow. 200 times.

Basam Shakhashiri: Almost 200 appearances, yes. Thank you for your hospitality and for affording me the opportunity to visit with your listeners. You have wonderful listeners. But Larry, I have a question for you.

Larry Meiller: Oh, okay. [laughter]

Basam Shakhashiri: Is it okay to have a question?

Larry Meiller: Yeah, go ahead.

Basam Shakhashiri: So, Larry, why do you do what you do? [laughter] And it's a two-part question. Why do you do what you do for decades you've done it, and what have you learned from your listeners?

Larry Meiller: Ooh. Well, I'm kind of an extension person. I was first exposed to extension when I was probably 7 years old. I was in 4-H. 4-H is an extension thing, and I learned that it was fun and exciting to share information. We'd put together exhibits, we would give talks, we would do a lot of things that were focused on communicating with people, to be perfectly honest, and trying to get information across to them in a way that they would enjoy. And so, I guess the reason I'm doing what I'm doing is that I enjoy that kind of work. I learned about it at a very early age, and I've really enjoyed doing this work. And you mentioned about what have I learned from listeners. I've learned that most people, no matter I don't think their politics or their religion or background, most people are decent

people. They want to learn, they're willing to share what they know, and my goodness, I can't tell you how many times people have called in with very great questions that stimulated conversations or that had answers to questions that sometimes the guests or my myself didn't have an answer for. So I've learned across a whole variety of topics over my life and gotten a second PhD, I think, from my own listeners. So, I guess that's my answer to that, Bassam.

Basam Shakhashiri: That's very, very satisfying, enlightening, and inspiring. And it emphasizes the importance of conversations and listening. And Larry, thank you so much for what you have done with this program. This is the last time you and I will speak on the air. Yeah, will we speak again?

Larry Meiller: Well, I hope so. [laughter] Maybe not on the air, but in person. We've done that many a time, too, over the years.

Basam Shakhashiri: Yes, it's just a feeble attempt to be humorous here. [laughter] I want you to know how much I have heard from listeners about your programs, not only when I'm on, but other programs that you have hosted and guided and invited and the skill that you have in making everyone feel comfortable and saying what they want to say, not that you necessarily agreed with what they're saying, but that's a tremendous characteristic, Larry. I thank you and of course, I wish you well in what you're going to do next and maybe, just maybe, your successor will host you for a visit, who knows?

Larry Meiller: [laughter] Who knows? I'm going to close quickly with a listener comment, and that relates to a tune. You gave us a tune, and a listener cited a Joni Mitchell song called Woodstock that included the lyrics, "We are stardust, we are golden, we are billion-year-old carbon, and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden." On that note, Bassam Shakhashiri, our guest. Coming up next, news. Stay with us. I'm Larry Meiller.