2019’s most commented stories on Ars Technica—and their top comments!

Aurich Lawson / Getty

reader comments

71 with 43 posters participating

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Yesterday, we gave you the top 20 Ars stories of the year in terms of number of readers. Today, it’s time for a quite different list: the 20 stories with the largest number of comments. As a free bonus, we’re including both the “highest-rated” and the “most insightful” user comment attached to each piece. If you’re a regular Ars commenter, who knows? You might even find your own contribution immortalized here.

As you might expect, the stories on this list touch on a lot of hot-button topics, including neo-Nazis, opsec bungles by politicians, censorship, anti-vaxxers, and even copyright policy. Things are about to get spicy. Let’s get to the controversy!

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s (D-N.Y.) Green New Deal was introduced in February. It envisions a public works program focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and employing American workers. The bill notes that the US is responsible for a large portion of greenhouse gases and argues that the US should take the lead in addressing climate change. As a non-binding resolution, it wouldn’t actually *do* much, but it would

“potentially affirm the sense of the House that these things should be done in the coming years.”

Highest-rated comment, from Fancy Internet Person:

> *yaksplat wrote:*
> *What will the Green new deal do?*
> *Bankrupt the country.*
> *What isn’t in the bill?*
> *How to pay for it.*
>
> *We found money for the war on Iraq and last year’s tax giveaway to the rich.*

Most insightful comment, from johnsonwax:

> *Our electricity provider is SCE (who we’re generally okay with) but for the solar install my wife solicited a number of quotes and chose a woman owned business that was fantastic. Solar installer businesses don’t need to be huge multinationals. They don’t need to capitalize on a $1B power generation plant. We are a power generator, but it cost around $10 grand—about ⅓ the cost of a new car. That’s within reach of individuals, and creates market opportunities for businesses like Solar City that flip the script on how to capitalize that project. The installer business doesn’t need a lot of capital as well. It’s a hybrid roofing/electrical business that tends to be a bit higher up on the training needed than a conventional roofing/electrical business, but still trade-school level. It’s a mostly labor driven business. The 4 workers that did our install were great. They really knew their stuff, and 3 of the 4 were licensed electricians. The 4th was a trainee. Two of them also had worked for years in the roofing business and were responsible for the panels – the other two replaced our service panel, installed the inverter, and all that jazz. I chatted with them a fair bit – they seemed to love their job. Paid much better than being a roofer, was more interesting because each*

install has different problems to solve, and the work is higher tech.

These jobs tend to not be seen very much by the public. We see the displaced coal miners, but we don't see the 10 renewable energy jobs that replaced that coal miner. The businesses are smaller and lower profile, but there's a ton of them. This is an industry change from large, heavily capitalized industries to smaller, individually owned businesses. South Carolina spend $9B on a nuclear power plant that will never open. $9B would put residential solar on 900,000 households here in CA, and result in far more jobs in the process. What's more, that nuclear plant would have lost 50% of its production to transmission losses, compared to 10% for my rooftop system. By minimizing the amount of centralized power generation and distributing it as broadly as is reasonably possible, you get benefits in capitalization, recurring costs, jobs created, and efficiency. It's kind of a no-brainer, but it requires a willingness to cut the big power corporations out, which conservatives in particular seem to be unwilling to do despite their constant adulation for small business owners. You want to help small business owners, do what California does.

876 comments

In April, SpaceX successfully launched its Falcon Heavy rocket. As Eric Berger described it, "Then, the fun began. In something of a space ballet, the two side boosters reentered Earth's atmosphere, and then made controlled burns to land within meters of one another at sites along the Florida coast. A few minutes later the center core, burning its engines hard, landed on a drone ship in the Atlantic Ocean."

Highest-rated comment, from Frodo Douchebaggins:

"Oh how strange. Seems I managed to book the conference room

> *with the biggest TV during the launch window.”*

Most insightful comment, from ivekadi:

> *wyrmhole wrote:*
> *Also, eyeballing it MECO occurred at just over 10000 km/h or ~2.8km/s. I don’t have the table of MECO velocities but that seems really high. Hot landing and it didn’t bat an eye.*
>
> *The absolute (until today, that is) MECO record is 9552km/h or 2.65km/s for the GPS-III mission on F9 on 2018.12.23.*
>
> *The previous FH MECO was 9541km/h or 2.65km/s.*
>
> *Today`s MECO was 12.5% higher – 10730km/h or 2.98 km/s or 1189km/h MORE (+0.33km/s) or 26.5% more energetic than previous FH*

876 comments

One recurring theme of 2019 was groups feeling aggrieved by perceived bias from social media platforms. Facebook, as the largest social media site in the world, is frequently accused of bias against one group or another. In response, a law firm conducted an audit of Facebook. Led by former Sen. John Kyl, a Republican who had represented Arizona, the audit failed to show evidence of “any particular anti-conservative bias.”

Naturally, some conservatives didn’t like the result.

Highest-rated comment, by microlith:

> *I think the real problem is that they call themselves “conservative” but are, in reality, anti-democratic, conspiracy-minded, paranoid, racist, regressivist, reactionaries with an authoritarian streak a mile wide.*

Most insightful comment, by Eurynom0s:

> *Facebook hired the Daily Caller (Tucker Carlson's online propaganda rag) to do fact checking for them. Accusations from the right of being liberal or anti-conservative have absolutely no basis in reality and are purely about trying to cow people by slinging shit.*

885 comments

Google is now requiring any organization that wishes to run ads related to abortions to be pre-certified. The goal is to clearly identify the type of services offered by the provider, with their ads automatically tagged with "Provides abortions" or "Does not provide abortions" so that women will have a clearer understanding of what they'll be getting if they use the provider's services.

As is the case with anything involving terminating pregnancies, the Ars discussion was heated (and long).

Highest-rated comment, by Imbrium:

> *The whole idea that there is a fetal heartbeat at 6 weeks is a deliberate lie by anti-abortion groups. There isn't even a heart at 6 weeks, and the "fetus" is actually an embryo about 1 cm in size. It is absolutely not viable, so treating the embryo as a person is very, very misleading.*

Most insightful comment, by fitten:

> *Imbrium wrote:*
> *There isn't even a heart at 6 weeks, and the "fetus" is actually an embryo about 1 cm in size. It is absolutely not viable, so treating the embryo as a person is very, very misleading.*
>
> *Rector wrote:*
> *I'm not taking issue with your point about "fetal heartbeat", but whether or not a human zygote, or an embryo or a fetus is*

> *a person at any stage in its development is a person depends totally on how you define person and that's actually where the disagreement lies.*
>
> *Or you can look at the history of the hotbutton topic. Evangelicals used to stay out of politics… until politicians were able to convince them to participate to support segregation. After that defeat, political strategists literally sat around trying to think of how to keep this new voter base engaged. They came up with "abortion". If you go back to the Southern Baptist Convention (extremely conservative) back in the 1970s, they resolved that abortion under certain conditions, namely rape, incest, and severe fetal deformity should be permitted. Today, we see the result of political strategists (complete opposition… because common ground doesn't generate the hate and vehemence that occurs in diametric opposition which gets people to the voting booths)… and people think they've come to these conclusions themselves.*

893 comments

63Red Safe was advertised as a "Yelp for MAGA." Users can rate businesses from a "conservative perspective," rating the safety of a business based on four factors, including whether it allows for legal concealed carry.

Unfortunately for the users and developer, a French security researcher found that the app contained the 63Red founder's plaintext password in the code, and it failed to use any sort of authentication for the apps API calls. That means anyone could spoof any user of the app.

63Red founder Scott Wallace accused the researcher of "illegal and failed attempts to access our database servers."

The app was pulled from Apple and Google's app stores shortly after the disclosure.

Highest-rated comment, by Dilbert:

> *cmbasnett wrote:*
> *An embarrassment to my profession.*
>
> *IT? Half our profession is an embarrassment to our profession. :(*

Most insightful comment, by vartec:

> *panton41 wrote:*
> *Because the FBI has so much authority in France…*
>
> */s>*
>
> *drwatz0n wrote:*
> *Actually, they do. The US maintains an extradition agreement with France, so any serious crime where someone is actually indicted could result in an extradition request being sent. As far as I know, France and the EU won’t extradite if the person is at risk of being executed. However, that wouldn’t apply here.*
>
> *France (like a number of other countries) does not extradite their own citizens.*

900 comments

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