

## **Wyo. science standards law sparks national debate**

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### **Body**

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Science standards law sparks national debate

At a glance

Wyoming's decision not to allow consideration of some science standards because they include topics like **climate change** is meeting resistance nationally from parents and educators seeking to prevent similar restrictions from happening elsewhere.

For more information on the **Climate** Science Students Bill of Rights visit: <http://climatesciencerights.org/>.

By Aerin Curtis

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CHEYENNE - Wyoming students deserve classes that focus on the science of **climate change** and leave out political agendas.

That's the thought behind Thursday's launch of a **Climate** Science Students Bill of Rights by several national groups.

Groups involved include **Climate** Parents, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the National Center for Science Education and the Alliance for **Climate** Education.

"Our organizations are joining together to assert the right of all students in every state to learn the established science of **climate change**," **Climate** Parents member John Friedrich said.

Actions like that taken by the Wyoming Legislature earlier this year to block standards that include the teaching of **climate** science are what prompted the bill, **Climate** Parents director and co-founder Lisa Hoyos said Thursday.

"We were alarmed about what we saw in Wyoming, where fossil fuel supporters in the Legislature banned the Next Generation Science Standards for consideration by the Board of Education," she said. "This was a signal to us."

In Wyoming, the review of the state's current science standards was delayed when a budget footnote stripped funding from consideration of the Next Generation Science Standards, Wyoming for Science Education organizer and **Climate** Parents member Marguerite Herman of Cheyenne said.

"The (State Board of Education) has been ready to adopt those standards for about a year," she said.

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When the footnote was passed, some legislators said they did not believe in human involvement in climate change and that the standards were against the fossil fuel industry.

Members of the State Board of Education recently voted to halt all further review work on Wyoming's science standards until the Legislature ends its prohibition of the Next Generation Science Standards.

"The next step, the thing that is going to break the logjam, is going to be the legislators' action when they convene in January," Herman said. "The Bill of Rights may give them the mandate they're looking for."

The Climate Science Students Bill of Rights is a tool for community members, teachers and parents, she said.

"(It) will make (legislators) aware of how they've mucked things up," she said. "If they're looking for some kind of impetus, they can point to this, and we can all move on."

The document supports the ideas that students should be able to:

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Receive quality science education as determined by educators free from ideological or political interference.

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Explore the causes and consequences of climate change.

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Learn that ways to slow climate change exist.

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Examine the data and evidence on climate change in an environment that promotes questioning and understanding.

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Understand how climate science informs social, political and personal decisions.

Another point of the document is to let people involved in education know there is support for teaching students fact-based climate science, National Center for Science Education programs and policy director Mark McCaffrey said.

"(There are) overt efforts, as we've seen in Wyoming, to deliberately block the access of students to learn about climate science," he said. "And a lot of teachers don't have the background, or they think teaching both sides of a phony science controversy is a good plan."

Depending on what schools students attend, there can be a great difference in what, if anything, students learn about climate science, he said.

The Wyoming Legislature's action does not prevent individual teachers from teaching about climate change, though, both state and local officials have said. But the state's outdated science standards need to be brought up to date, they argue.

Several of the document's sponsors said they also are in support of states using the Next Generation Science Standards because of how the standards treat topics like climate change.

But organizers also stressed that students need to learn skills like critical thinking, how to sort reliable and unreliable data, and how to read and understand data.

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"We know that climate change is one of the most important issues of our time," Union of Concerned Scientists climate scientist Melanie Fitzpatrick said. "We need young people to think critically about it."

It is important for today's students to have access to information about climate change because they are going to have to take care of it, she said.

"We always have to be prepared for the false debate - that's where science educators and teachers come in, to make sure that we're pushing back against the false debate," she said. "The evidence is overwhelming that it's human caused, and it's false to say there's another side."

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