



Founder, Noel Smith (1933-2022)

## HUSBAY NEWSLETTER

October 2023

### ‘No left-wing indoctrination’: Climate science under attack in classrooms

By Scott Waldman | 09/12/2023 06:47 AM EDT

Political battles over climate change are increasingly being fought in the classroom.

Conservative activists and politicians in states across the country are trying to limit or distort the teaching of climate science to schoolchildren, marking a growing front in the culture war against social movements over race, gender identity and the environment.

State education officials, local school board members and Republican lawmakers in states from Florida to Montana have tried to reshape climate curriculum over the last year, with varying success.

In Ohio, legislators are expected to pass a bill that could require colleges and universities to teach “both sides” of climate change. A member of a local school board in Pennsylvania sought to block the use of a climate-themed novel in middle school because, he said, it was “propaganda.” Meanwhile, classroom content by a far-right group that produces animated videos that denigrate climate action is being approved for use in schools in numerous states.

“Climate change education is part and parcel of the ongoing culture wars,” said Glenn Branch, deputy director of the National Center for Science Education.

The rise in inaccurate school materials comes amid a [summer of climate extremes](#), including the [hottest temperatures ever recorded](#) over a three-month period worldwide. There have been deadly wildfires in Hawaii and Greece, devastating floods in Vermont and Libya and dangerous smoke along the East Coast from unusual forest fires in eastern Canada. On Monday, NOAA said

there have been more \$1 billion disasters in the U.S. this year than ever before.

Perhaps nowhere are climate lessons being reshaped by conservative politicians more than in Texas, where members of the education board have tried in recent years to block programs that teach about reducing greenhouse gases, emphasizing instead the benefits of fossil fuels. The state education board is now deciding whether it [will block textbooks](#) that accurately portray climate science.

In Florida, state officials approved for the first time the [classroom use of content from PragerU](#), a conservative group partially funded by members of the fossil fuel industry that produces partisan videos for students in prekindergarten through high school. Some Texas officials are weighing a similar move.

Last week, the Oklahoma superintendent of public instruction, Ryan Walters, announced that his state would also use PragerU content in the classroom. It will largely be used in social studies classes, Walters said.

“This is also content that will be factually based with no left-wing indoctrination. We always want our kids to know the facts,” he said in a video announcing the move.

Those moves and others contradict climate science, which shows that humans are warming the Earth at an unprecedented pace by burning fossil fuels. Public sentiment among some conservatives has slowly shifted to accept those findings. Polling shows that young people, including Republicans, are far more concerned about global warming than older Americans.

Yet climate science is a relatively new topic for schools that wasn’t taught a generation ago, said Branch of the Center for Science Education,

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Haiku Quintets: [dandana.us/fivepalms](http://dandana.us/fivepalms)

**Nihilism's Cure**  
the world is so big  
the universe is so grand  
I am so tiny

time is infinite  
history spans forever  
my life is so short

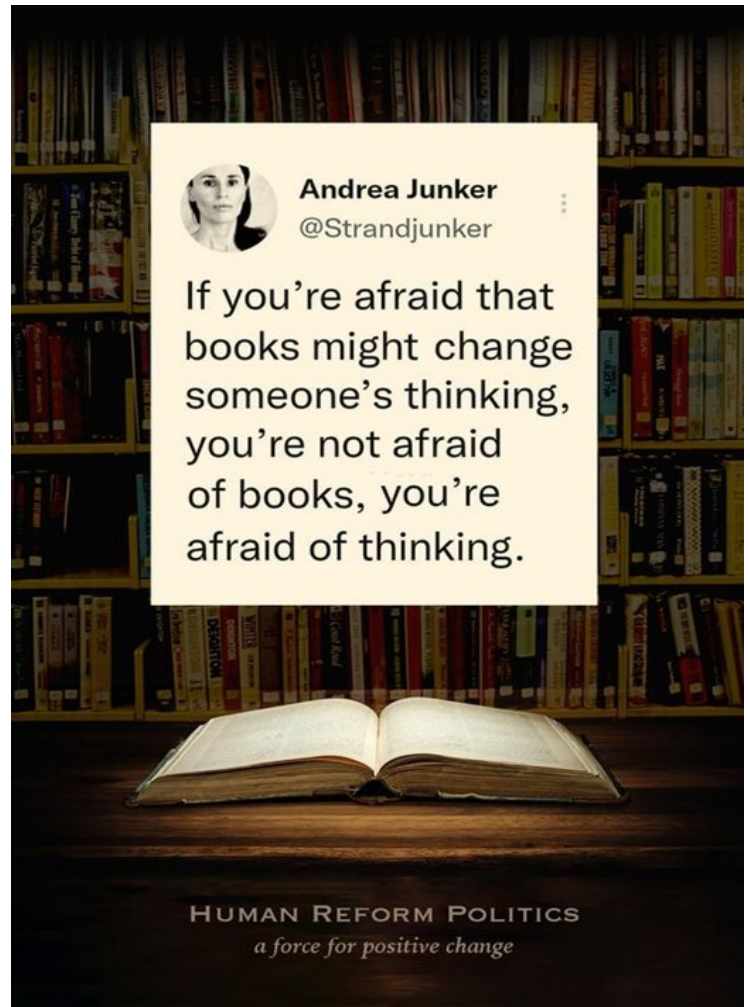
systems fail their task  
I see, care, but cannot do  
I am powerless

I am but a drop  
in the Sea of Existence,  
insignificant

but I can watch, awed,  
in the company of friends  
'til my movie ends



Photo credit: Technology



#### MOVIE REVIEW Bob La Salle

I have just watched the movie, "Are you There God? It's Me Margret" which was adapted from the book of the same name written by Judy Blume. Ms. Blume's books have been widely banned because they were written for teenagers and are about growing up sexually. I had seen reviews of this movie and had heard talk about it for some time and was intrigued, so I went looking and found it available on YouTube. (URL at the end of this piece.)

The movie deals with an 11-year-old girl trying to cope with her maturing; developing breasts, getting her period; and her despair because she is a late bloomer. She falls in with a group of girls her age that is dominated by a controlling young lady who fills their heads with a lot of nonsense. So, she prays to god for all sorts of things, which doesn't help.

A huge subplot revolves around her parents and grandparents. Her mother is Christian, and her father is Jewish. Her mother's parents, who are rabid Christians, disowned their daughter when she married because they could not accept a Jewish son-in-

law. As a result, Margret was raised without religion being told she could make up her own mind when she grew up. This came home to me and is typical of how religion can break up families because it happened to my father.

Not knowing anything about any religion, she decides to try them all. She goes to temple with her grandmother, didn't understand a thing; since one of her friends is black, she goes to a black church, she kind of liked all the singing; tries a non-descript Christian church with another of her friends, eh!; and has a foray into a catholic church. She neither accepts nor understands any of them.

The culmination is when both sets of grandparents show up at their house at the same time. Over dinner, a huge shouting fight breaks out among the adults about whether Margret is to be Jewish or Christian and when that should happen. Margret ends it by shouting them down and telling them that she doesn't believe in a god anyway.

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**Humanism** is a progressive philosophy of life that, *without theism or other supernatural beliefs*, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. To learn more go [here](#).

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adding that there are regional skirmishes over how and whether to teach climate science, but they are uneven and unlikely to find traction in much of the country.

“The arc is bending toward more and better climate change education nationally, and that’s going to be uneven, and incremental and scattered, but that’s the trendline,” he said.

That may be why plans to restrict climate education have failed in some states.

In Montana, a “scientific fact” bill that would have described climate science as a theory died in the state legislature earlier this year. In North Carolina, lawmakers [failed in their bid](#) to replace earth sciences with a computer class. In Utah, the board of education [narrowly shot down](#) an effort to remove the teaching of climate science from schools. And in Indiana, students returned to a school in recent weeks with new standards that required a more robust climate education.

Still, in some areas of the country, the efforts to restrain climate education are advancing.

In Pennsylvania, the Kutztown school district backed off a plan earlier this year to have students read Alan Gratz’s “Two Degrees.” The young-adult climate novel focuses on the lives of children and the dangers they face in a world that has already warmed to 2 degrees Celsius. School board member Jason Koch complained that the book was “propaganda” that would make students feel guilty about living in a society driven by fossil fuels, [according to the Reading Eagle](#).

“It is not the purpose of a school to promote a particular political agenda,” he told the paper.

In Ohio, lawmakers passed the Higher Education Enhancement Act, which could require colleges and universities to teach “both sides” of issues that have been deemed controversial, including climate change. The Republican state senator who sponsored the bill, Jerry Ciri-no, [said teaching climate denial is important](#) because there are “different views that exist out there about the extent of the climate change and the solutions to try to alter climate change.” The bill passed the Senate and has been sent to the state House, which has a Republican supermajority.

At a meeting of the Texas state board of education last month, some members questioned why

climate change mitigation is a topic being taught to students. Some of them distorted climate science and claimed falsely that researchers are evenly split between those who say climate change is a threat and those who say it’s not.

“This business of saying all the scientists agree that climate change is the problem and all that sort of stuff, it’s simply not true,” board member Patricia Hardy told E&E News. “There are a lot of scientists who don’t believe that, and these are some of your top researchers.”

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican, is giving away free copies of his recent book called “The Kids Guide to the Truth About Climate Change.” It veers away from the findings of climate scientists.

“Parents, you may have heard from your kids that the Earth is soon going to be an uninhabitable hellscape,” Huckabee said in a promotional video for the book that ran on Fox News. “Well, that’s because some of their teachers and the media have an agenda, but is it really what kids should be learning?”

One of the most prominent climate denial groups in the country, the Illinois-based Heartland Institute, has been sending materials to teachers that attack climate science for years. The organization sent out 8,000 books to science teachers this year, down from about 25,000 six years ago.

In Texas, efforts by the Republican majority on the board of education may prove to be the most durable. Its recent revisions to science curriculum push teachers to omit talking about climate mitigation and focus instead on the carbon cycle. Those lessons won’t be revisited for about a decade.

That concerns Aicha Davis, a Democrat serving on the board.

“I don’t want students graduating from Texas public schools that don’t even understand how their actions can have long-term effects on the climate,” she said. “When we take away that knowledge, we’re taking away so much from them.”

Davis is hopeful students will overcome those obstacles.

“We have amazing teachers all around Texas that know the students need that information,” she said.

## Special Interest Groups

Here is a list of Special Interest Groups (If you have an idea for one, please let us know).

### SIG Names

### Focus of the Group

**Thoughts of the Day (1st Wed)**

Attendees discuss non-political topics that effect most of us.

**Current Affairs (CAF): (3rd Wed)** Events discussed during the current news cycle

**Open Forum (OF):**

This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.

Check our website for specific information by clicking [HERE](#).

## Monthly Meetings

All programs begin at 5:30pm with a social gathering and presentation at 6:00. Times for other events are noted. Presentations are held at the Fruitville Library, 100 Apex Rd, Sarasota, FL 34240

Tuesday October 3, 2023

Fruitville Library

Dale Andereson

Tuesday November 14, 2023

Fruitville Library

Compassion and choices  
(Zack Anderson) TBD

Wednesday December 13, 2023

Fruitville Library

Monday January 8, 2024

TBD—New Year Party

Saturday February 17, 2024

Marina Jacks

Darwin Day Luncheon

Sunday April 7, 2024

Turtle Beach Pavilion

Carl Sagan Day Picnic

**Chat & Chew** Meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at Perkins restaurant at Fruitville and Cattlemen at 12noon. All are welcome at Chat & Chew regardless of membership status. Enjoy the company of like minded folk and have a leisurely lunch and some stimulating conversation.

## Starry Messenger: Cosmic Perspectives on Civilization

Reprinted from [NY Journal of Books](#). Review by Karen R. Koenig:

**“This book is a compelling plea for earth’s inhabitants to put on their science hats and come together to make a better life for everyone.”**

What makes *Starry Messenger* such an exceptional book is that most readers have their feet planted on terra firma and will never have quite the long view of planet earth and its inhabitants that author Neil deGrasse Tyson has. A world-renowned astrophysicist, science communicator, and Director of the Hayden Planetarium, his numerous books on topics such as astrophysics and evolution are written for the lay public with an abundance of wit, wisdom, warmth, and compassion for his fellow humans.

He starts out by stating the book’s intent: “*Starry Messenger* is a wake-up call to civilization.” Tyson goes on to share his view that science may, in fact, be the only pursuit that *will* save us from ourselves because it provides the tools to separate fact from fiction. He is honest about the strengths and challenges of the quest for objective truth, which exists beyond personal truth and the perception of reality from our senses. Acknowledging that what is science to-

day may be proven false tomorrow, he insists science is still the best, and perhaps the only, tool to help us get life right.

Tyson makes a case for space exploration, methodically countering the notion that we cannot afford it because we must fund solutions for earth’s more pressing problems. In fact, he makes the case that in order to solve them, we cannot afford to ignore whatever discoveries we make as we traverse the universe because who knows what we might learn or discover along the way that will save us.

Shifting between discussing the cosmos and earthly matters, Tyson drills down on the damage earthlings are doing to ourselves and our environment. In a book full of unexpected humor, one of the funniest recurring questions is what aliens from other planets might make of us. Might they view us as pets, food, or childlike creatures who persist in tribalism, emotionalism, impulsivity, and selfishness, and ignore scientific truths at their own peril?

The book spans topics from the moon to quantum physics to what he calls “meatarians and vegetarians” and the inanity of speceism (treating “one species of animal differently in any way”) which underlies our bias toward certain animals and against others.

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## President's Message

OCTOBER 2023

Both Judy and I just received our latest Covid shots and earlier our flu shots. I hope many of you are in the process of doing the same. While at it, be sure to get your RSV vaccine.

I bring up the vaccines because we are beginning our monthly meetings. For the safety of all, these vaccines are vital. We also have four HUSBAY luncheon meetings a month, and we want vaccinated members at these meetings.

On another note, Paul Jacques, a valuable member of our Board, has decided not to run for the Board again in 2024. Paul has been a valuable member of the Board, and we hate to see him leave.

Any member interested in joining the Board for

2024 should let me know. It's a three year term and includes four quarterly meetings a year. Board members are called on to make decisions about Board policies and help with our programs and events. Please read the bylaws to get a clearer picture of Board members' duties and responsibilities. (Go to [www.HUSBAY.org](http://www.HUSBAY.org) to read the bylaws.)

Or, email me at [dbhelgager@comcast.net](mailto:dbhelgager@comcast.net) if you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors.

Here's a great opportunity to serve secular humanism and your friends in HUSBAY.

Dave Helgager

## Continued from page 4

He swoons over our amazing moon while helping us see our planet through the eyes of the curious children we once were.

Because this book is a compelling plea for earth's inhabitants to put on their science hats and come together to make a better life for everyone, Tyson uses science, including mathematics, to help us see that accepting and enjoying diversity is the only way forward for our species. He explains how our insistence "that objects, things and ideas fit into neat categories apparently runs deep and derives from an inability to cope with ambiguity." But he warns that "nature carries no obligation to accommodate our limited capacity to interpret reality," urging us to stop seeking comfortable answers so we can come to terms with and combat the randomness and uncaringness of the universe.

He shows how human sentience has benefits, as do speed, flight, visual acuity, and numerous abilities of plants and animals that we do not possess. He also provides evidence of how one gender, color, or race is not better than another and that thinking otherwise is due to our insecurity and misguided perception.

Tyson wonders how far humans would take their primal instincts if we had not developed what we

call civilization, emphasizing that the law and order which purports to keep us in check and on track is not equivalent to seeking truth and justice, which he believes is a more humane and useful pursuit. On the subject of law and order, he makes a pitch for policies based exclusively on science and the scientific method.

Tyson weighs in on many topics: a woman's right to govern her body, differently abled people being called exactly that, how religiosity distorts our views of life and death, and how to differentiate the two. He maintains that "It is better to be alive than dead and better to have lived than not been born." Unsurprisingly, he sees death as any rational scientist would—as the end of life—and is at peace with the fact that he will meet his physical and spiritual end one day.

He helps us swallow what is a bitter pill for some to swallow: that we as a planet or individuals are neither special nor the center of a cosmos that does not give a hoot about us, our dreams, or our lives. On the other hand, he argues from a place of deep disappointment, compassion and anguish that how we care for each other and the planet will come back to haunt us and that unless we take our stewardship of the earth far more seriously and proactively, future generations will not get to "live, and ultimately die, in this glorious universe."

## Florida's new 'Christian' standardized test is how conservatives 'shove religion in public schools': analysis.

Written by: Brandon Gage Sept. 14, 2023 – from AlterNet

Florida governor and 2024 Republican presidential primary contender Ron DeSantis is causing "harm" to "public education as we know it in part by letting Christian Nationalists run the show," reports the *Friendly Atheist's* Hemant Mehta.

"Florida's public university system announced that it would accept results from the Classic Learning Test (CLT) for students applying to places like the University of Florida or Florida State University. Incoming freshmen can submit their CLT scores instead of the more traditional SAT or ACT tests," Mehta explains.

He writes, "The problem with the CLT is that there's very little evidence that it's a good indicator of college preparedness. The test, which launched in 2015, has only been taken by about 21,000 students total. By comparison, 1.7 million students took the SAT and 1.3 million took the ACT in 2022 alone. Both of those latter tests are constantly revised and updated. There's no similar track record for the CLT. Furthermore, 85% of the students who've taken the CLT are white and 99% of test-takers attend private schools and charter schools or are home-schooled. The 'C' may as well stand for 'Christian.'"

Mehta explains that "conservatives" are "eager to push the CLT as a valid alternative to the ACT and SAT despite that lack of information" be-

cause "the Republican base loves it."

Mehta adds, "The CLT is the test of choice for several conservative Christian colleges (like Michigan's Hillsdale College) while the SAT has become a bogeyman for conservatives because it's run by the College Board, which they see as too liberal. (The College Board oversees AP testing.) The CLT's Board of Academic Advisors reads like a laundry list of faith-based school leaders, conservative activists (e.g. **Christopher Rufo**), and (hey why not) **Cornel West**."

Although "the CLT looks very familiar, with sections devoted to math, writing, and verbal reasoning," Mehta notes that "the topics are much more narrow—and much more religious. It highlights the 'centrality of the Western tradition' at the expense of all other ones, which means there's a preference for works that are white, Western European, and Judeo-Christian. If you think Dead White Guys represent the pinnacle of education and modern writers who cover a wider range of topics can be ignored, this is the test for you."

Moreover, while "the questions aren't exactly tough to figure out," Mehta stresses that the CLT is "a way to shove religion in public schools without explicitly endorsing a specific brand of Christian beliefs. It's not that the CLT directly promotes religion, but it indirectly sends the message that understanding religious writing can be beneficial. For now, it also limits the options of where high school students who take the exam can go to college since most schools—the ones with a good reputation—don't take the CLT seriously."

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The girl that plays Margret, Abby Ryder Fortson, portrays her as sweet and endearing and she just melts your heart with the anguish she suffers through this movie. There is a happy ending, but I'm not going to spoil it for you should you choose to watch. You can see it free on YouTube. Here is the URL. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykQ7Tt3rMK4>

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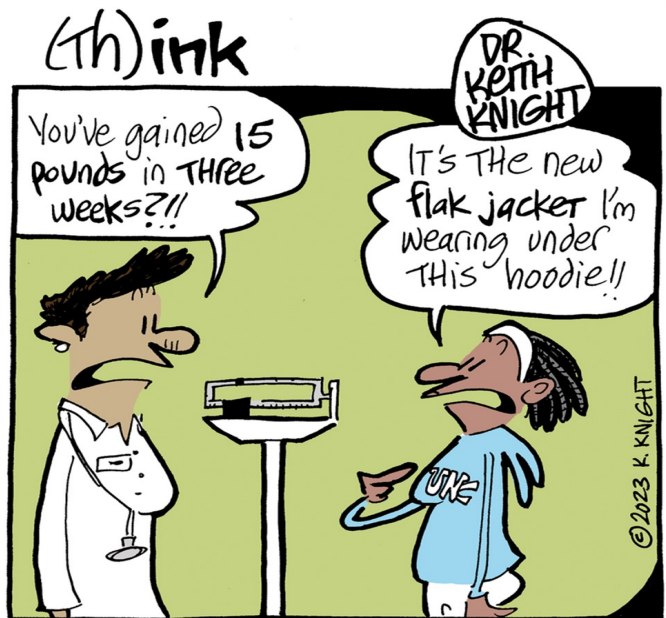
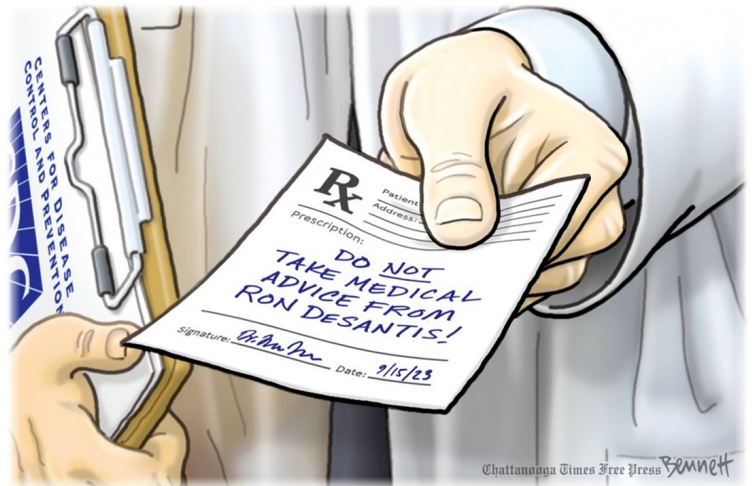
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The Cartoon page



THE FRESHMAN 15 AT UNC CHAPEL HILL

