

Teachers the key to environment education

Letter to the Editor 3:11 p.m. CDT July 14, 2015

Thank you for printing William Gail's article on climate change. He argued whether one accepts scientific conclusions that current climate change is man-made or whether one rejects that fact and insists the climate is changing because of nature but that, either way, we need more climate studies to understand it better and protect ourselves. A clever line of reasoning, but flawed.

It's flawed in several ways. If someone dismisses facts that are supported by a ton of collected and measured data, historical evidence, projections and basic science, then that person won't benefit from more studies and more facts. His understanding of the world is shaped not by facts, but by his own biases and wishful thinking.

Second, teachers know that one shouldn't teach by offering a wrong answer, showing it's wrong and then revealing the correct answer. Students only remember the first wrong answer, forget it was disproved, and tune out the correct answer. Gail's argument suggests that denying climate change is a valid, tenable position. This is pedagogically unwise.

Third, climate advocates have concluded that people don't need more facts about climate change, rather they need more values-based learning, values discussions and better religion and spirituality teachers. People know we're causing dangerous climate change, but many people choose not to care or not to take it seriously because they lack proper training in ethics and religious values. They weren't taught how to think about their place in the world, their connection to nature and other people, and their responsibilities to future generations.

Good teachers of religious texts, religious traditions and spirituality can awaken in adults a deep values system, concern for others and willingness to act responsibly. Instead of another study, we need good teachers of traditional religious values like justice, prudence, honesty and courage — then we'll see national climate change legislation.

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