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[Senate Bill 55](#) [4], which would empower science denial in the classroom, is still awaiting a hearing in the House Education Committee, currently scheduled for February 13, 2017. In the meantime, the bill continues to attract state and national attention.

Writing for the *Washington Post* (February 5, 2017), Valerie Strauss [noted](#) [5], "The bill has been blasted by scientific and education organizations, including the South Dakota Department of Education, the School Administrators of South Dakota, the National Science Teachers Association, the National Association of Biology Teachers, the National Association of Geoscience Teachers, the National Center for Science Education, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Associated School Boards of South Dakota[,] and the South Dakota Education Association."

Adding its condemnation was Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which in a February 3, 2017, letter to the chair and vice chair of the House Education Committee, [warned](#) [6] (PDF), "Rather than promote scientific thought, [SB 55] would authorize teachers to discuss and teach 'intelligent design' as a 'critique' or 'weakness' of evolution. There is no scientific basis for intelligent design and federal courts have made clear that teaching it in public school science classrooms violates the Establishment Clause." The bill would thus "allow creationists to continue to make non-scientific attacks against evolution."

Writing in the Sioux Falls *Argus-Leader* (February 1, 2017), Mark Sweeney, a geology professor at the University of South Dakota, [protested](#) [7], "Spreading the false idea that evolution or climate change is scientifically controversial does not reflect the reality among scientists, and teaching the supposed 'controversy' does no one any good other than to breed unnecessary and ill-informed skepticism. ... If SB 55 is passed, there would be a real risk that many of South Dakota's students would receive the false impression that what they are taught about evolution and climate change is scientifically controversial."

Eric Wells, a physics professor at Augustana University, [added](#) [8] in the Sioux Falls *Argus-Leader* (February 2, 2017), "Teachers of science have the responsibility to present the best scientific understanding of the natural world as well as to describe the self-correcting nature of the scientific process. Local school boards should have the ability to ensure that this happens. Could a teacher express any idea, scientific or not, under protection of this bill? The ambiguous language of the bill either renders it meaningless or quite possibly produces an uncertain legal situation that could protect unscientific teaching. So why bother?"

A petition organized by Climate Parents — a national movement of parents, grandparents and families mobilizing for clean energy and climate solutions — urges South Dakota's legislators to reject what it describes as the "alternative facts" bill, warning that "SB 55 would allow political and ideological interference, and the teaching of non-scientific opinions, in South Dakota science classrooms." The petition is currently approaching its thousandth South Dakota signatory, which is particularly impressive in light of the fact that there are only about 850,000 residents in the state.

South Dakota's Senate Bill 55 is one of four similar bills currently active, along with Indiana's Senate Resolution 17, Oklahoma's Senate Bill 393, and Texas's House Bill 1485; South Dakota's is the only of them to have been passed by a chamber of the legislature.

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[5] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/02/05/an-alternative-facts-south-dakota-bill-sparks-fears-for-science-education-in-the-trump-era>

[6] [https://ncse.com/files/2017-02-01%20-%20SD%20SB%2055%20-Academic%20Freedom%20FINAL.docx\\_.pdf](https://ncse.com/files/2017-02-01%20-%20SD%20SB%2055%20-Academic%20Freedom%20FINAL.docx_.pdf)

[7] <http://www.argusleader.com/story/opinion/voices/2017/02/01/voice-dumb-science-education/97359164/>

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