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The Heartland Institute's recent stunt of mailing unsolicited packets of propaganda to thousands of teachers across the nation continues to win further bad publicity for the climate-change-denying think tank. (Self-inflicted damage is something of a Heartland specialty: remember its 2013 billboard comparing "believers" in global warming to the Unabomber? As the *Los Angeles Times* (May 9, 2012) [noted](#) [7], it cost Heartland the support not only of allies who reject the scientific consensus on climate change but also of a number of wealthy corporate sponsors.) But *Schadenfreude* isn't the only consequence. The stunt also seems to have invigorated a lot of educators, scientists, parents, environmentalists, and even legislators to speak up and speak out on the need to support climate education. Here's a chronologically arranged selection.

- Angela Fritz, the deputy weather editor of the *Washington Post* (March 29, 2017) [wrote](#) [8], "In my very unscientific, unvetted poll of the people who follow me on Twitter and Facebook, the feelings among teachers and parents were not positive. A few parents expressed downright horror and one even called his own school district to find out if teachers had received the book yet. I couldn't find any teachers who said it was common for political organizations to send ostensibly educational material to teachers." But she worried about teachers who "will read it and present it to their students as fact."
- In a March 31, 2017, letter to the *Washington Post*, Meghan Groome, the senior vice president of education at the New York Academy of Sciences, [observed](#) [9], "The campaign by the Heartland Institute to disseminate unscientific information about climate change takes climate science down a well-worn path: dress up propaganda with scientific-sounding vocabulary, identify a few 'credentialed skeptics,' then misuse phrases such as 'It's just a theory' to make it seem as if science and pseudoscience are equal."
- The *Bangor Daily News* (April 3, 2017) [took](#) [10] a local approach. Paul Mayewski, the director of the University of Maine's Climate Change Institute, described the mailing as "misinformation" and as "a pathetic attempt at trying to sway some people's minds," while middle school science teacher

Mickie Flores said that she planned on using the material to provide a “teachable moment” for her students, helping them to compare and contrast Heartland’s claims with what the science actually says.

- On April 4, 2017, the National Science Teachers Association warned its members about the mailing by e-mail, [noting](#) [11] (PDF), “**First**, scientists don’t disagree about climate change or its causes. **Second**, labeling propaganda as science does not make it so. **Third**, science teachers are the critical bastion in the war against reason. And the special interests know it.” (By the way, the alert provided a link to NCSE’s [resources](#) [12] on climate change education, and NCSE’s executive director Ann Reid was a cosigner.)
- Brandie Freeman, a science teacher in Georgia, took the trouble to [dissect](#) [13] the main claims of the Heartland booklet on her blog (April 5, 2017), devoting about 2500 words to the task. “The Heartland Institute sent their unabashedly biased propaganda to the wrong person,” she wrote, after sketching her qualifications, which include teaching Advanced Placement environmental science for nine years. “Frankly, I mourn the trees used in this poorly executed effort to undermine quality science education.”
- InsideClimate News (April 10, 2017) pulled no punches, [writing](#) [14], of the claims of Heartland’s cover letter, “These statements are false, as is the book’s contention that the overwhelming majority of scientists do not agree on the manmade cause of global warming.” The reporter also quoted NCSE’s Robert Luhn and Glenn Branch, and interviewed Brandie Freeman, who commented that as she read the mailing, “I very easily started refuting every point they made like ‘climate change is not caused by humans’ and ‘it’s not getting any warmer.’”
- [Writing](#) [15] for Gizmodo (April 11, 2017), Maddie Stone was spoiled for choice with “The Most Insane Claims From the Climate Conspiracy Manual Just Sent to Thousands of Teachers.” Particularly apt was her summary, “The Heartland Institute, a fossil fuel interest-backed organization .... would like you to believe that the IPCC, an international body comprising hundreds of scientists spanning academia, government and the private sector, is somehow the one feeding you the ideologically-driven drivel.”
- “The ranking Democrats on the House committees overseeing education, natural resources and science condemned the group’s mass-mailing campaign and counseled teachers to throw away the materials when they arrive,” as *Frontline* (April 12, 2017) [reported](#) [16]. Kudos to Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona), Bobby Scott (D-Virginia), and Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas)—who commented, “It’s unfortunate that they are willing to skew information and put it in the minds of young people”—for taking a stand!
- In Philadelphia, WHYY (April 12, 2017) [observed](#) [17], “The Heartland Institute’s guerrilla lobbying effort illustrates the predicament today’s science teachers face” in sorting, and helping their students to sort, through conflicting claims about science. Chillingly, it isn’t only misinformation about climate change such as purveyed by climate change deniers or evolution such as purveyed by creationists that can make its way into the classroom—a student teacher reported “a jarring episode where a number of students told him the Earth was flat.”
- NCSE’s Ann Reid, Glenn Branch, and Steve Newton [contributed](#) [18] a guest commentary discussing the Heartland Institute’s mailing of climate change denial material to teachers to the blog of the Union of Concerned Scientists (April 12, 2017). (Hey, who says we can’t promote our own contributions?) “The climate change deniers at the Heartland Institute have no scientifically credible evidence of their own, leaving them with no option but to lash out at the real scientific literature,” the commentary observed.

Two weeks after our April Fool’s Day [announcement](#) [19] that we were preparing a flyer to provide teachers with the information they need to explain why the materials in Heartland’s mailings are not

suitable for the science classroom, we are pleased to report that the flyer is almost ready. Watch this space! We have heard from dozens of teachers already with their reactions to receiving the mailing, but we would like to hear from more, to help us understand better how teachers respond to such mailings and what they need to cope with them in the future: send your stories to [info@ncse.com](mailto:info@ncse.com) [20]! And, of course, we welcome donations to support our work and help us reach our \$25,000 fundraising goal for April 2017. May we suggest, in honor of the 97% level of scientific consensus on climate change, [donations](#) [21] of \$9.70, \$97, and even (if you can swing it) \$970?

*Illustration: Parul15123, The Silver Lining (the view after a drizzle in Sariska) (2013), via Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under the Creative Commons [Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International Generic](#) [22] license.*

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- [9] [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/climate-change-is-misrepresented-and-misunderstood/2017/03/31/de1fff84-15a2-11e7-bb16-269934184168\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/climate-change-is-misrepresented-and-misunderstood/2017/03/31/de1fff84-15a2-11e7-bb16-269934184168_story.html)
- [10] [http://bangordailynews.com/2017/04/03/news/climate-change-skeptic-groups-mailing-campaign-targets-maine-teachers-bb16-269934184168\\_story.html](http://bangordailynews.com/2017/04/03/news/climate-change-skeptic-groups-mailing-campaign-targets-maine-teachers-bb16-269934184168_story.html)
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