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[Home](#) > Would a Wisconsin bill protect science denial on campus?

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[Would a Wisconsin bill protect science denial on campus?](#) [3]



A "Campus Free Speech Act" proposed in Wisconsin might protect college students who feel intimidated from expressing their opinions about the age of the earth in geology classes, according to the bill's lead sponsor.

The bill in question, [Assembly Bill 299](#) [4], would require the board of regents of the University of Wisconsin system to adopt a policy on free expression with various provisions affecting students, faculty, speakers, the public, and the institutions that are part of the system themselves, and to appoint a council on free expression to report on free expression issues to the board, the legislature, and the governor.

The *Capital Times* (June 7, 2017) [reported](#) [5] that during a May 11, 2017, committee hearing, Jesse Kremer (R-District 59) was asked, if a student was advancing the view that the earth is 6000 years old in class, "Is it okay for the professor to tell them they're wrong?" Kremer replied, "The earth is 6000 years old," adding, "That's a fact." The fact-checking service Politifact (June 8, 2017) duly investigated, [rating](#) [6] his statement false.

Kremer also said that "this bill stays out of the classroom." "Yet Kremer immediately speculated that students who felt intimidated from expressing their opinions in class could bring their complaints to the Council on Free Expression, an oversight board created in the bill," the *Capital Times* reported. "So the law could potentially cover things that happen in the classroom, he suggested."

During the hearing, a fellow sponsor of AB 299, Robin Vos (R-District 63), cited a different scientific topic that might be affected by the bill's passage. "Probably the biggest debate is global warming," Vos was quoted as saying. "A lot of people think it's settled science and an awful lot of people think it isn't. I think both sides should be brought to campus and let students decide."

A provision of the bill would require the state's public universities to be neutral on "public policy controversies," prompting Matt Rothschild of Wisconsin Democracy Campaign to [ask](#) [7], "So ... [UW researchers] would not be allowed to argue that climate change is real, and caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels? ... You are saying that UW institutions should remain neutral on the question of Darwin and natural selection versus creationism."

AB 299 was introduced on May 5, 2017, and referred to the House Committee on Colleges and Universities, where it passed with amendments on June 2, 2017, and was then referred to the House Committee on Rules. A counterpart bill, [Senate Bill 250](#) [8], was introduced on May 17, 2017, and was referred to the Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges, where it remains.

Asked recently about his view of the age of the earth by the Associated Press (June 7, 2017), Kremer [replied](#) [9] by avowing "my biblical belief. Other people believe the same thing. That's all I'm going to say."

[Anti-Evolution](#) [10]

[Climate Change](#) [11]

[Legislation](#) [12]

[2017](#) [13]

[Wisconsin](#) [14]

[+ read](#) [3]

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Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/18551>

[2] <https://ncse.com/users/glenn>

[3] <https://ncse.com/news/2017/06/would-wisconsin-bill-protect-science-denial-campus-0018551>

[4] <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2017/proposals/ab299>

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[6] <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2017/jun/08/jesse-kremer/republican-wisconsin-lawmaker-wrongly-states-its-f/>

[7] <http://www.wisdc.org/wdcstatement2017-05-11.php>

[8] <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2017/proposals/sb250>

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[10] <https://ncse.com/news/anti-evolution>

[11] <https://ncse.com/news/climate-change>

[12] <https://ncse.com/news/legislation>

[13] <https://ncse.com/news/2017>

[14] <https://ncse.com/news/wisconsin>