

It's like the Scopes Trial all over again



Have you seen the images pouring out of Europe and Australia? The stories about the kids taking it to the streets? Protesting against their government for not doing more to protect them?

Seeing their collective and determined faces, my midlife self thinks, “Whew, I don’t have to worry so much. They’ve got this.”

Delaney Reynolds is part of a group of young people also protesting here in Miami. The college student and her peers are plaintiffs in a court case against the State of Florida. They argue that avoiding action on climate planning violates their constitutional rights to a safe environment.

Gov. Ron DeSantis wants the case dismissed. But *Reynolds v. State of Florida* is a pioneering effort. The case is in line with the conclusion of the *Journal of Energy and Natural Resources Law* -- namely, that “the first kind of litigation to emerge [from climate change] is most likely to arise from failures to adapt to, or to prepare for, our changing climate.”

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Written by Kim Ogren, BT Contributor
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These lawsuits are worthwhile and potentially precedent setting. They're also necessary, unfair, and insufficient.

While I'm all "Go, kids!" the Florida Citizens' Alliance is metaphorically trying to write an alternative ending to *Inherit the Wind* -- the play and film based on the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 -- with their own kind of revival efforts in all 67 counties, including Miami-Dade, in the name of religious freedom.

While most groups work tirelessly to reduce the chaos exacerbated by climate change, Florida Citizens' Alliance seeks to increase it. Its leaders are generating uncertainty by putting a set of vague guidelines in the way of teaching the natural sciences to Florida's schoolchildren.

Last year they were successful in getting a seemingly innocuous state law adopted that actually requires every school board to name a hearing officer to rule on concerns from any citizen on textbooks, thus basically giving anyone the opportunity to try to edit teachers' curriculums.

Littering the state with modern "Scopes trials" will create a drag on the educational system, teachers and families -- or leave them behind altogether. And they'll distract us all from our positive efforts.

The strategy is unfolding in phases and on different fronts. The group's current legislative priority supports Ocala Sen. Dennis Braxley's HB 989, which would require teaching alternatives to science-based education, including alternatives to the science of evolution.

The *Tampa Bay Times* reports that according to the Alliance, that fixer bill "is needed because curriculum currently taught in Florida schools equates to 'political and religious indoctrination.'"

On the ground, the group is conducting legal reviews in 63 counties that have so far ignored the hearing officer requirement. And they claim to have e-mails for up to 50,000 potential supporters who may mess with your kids' education. The Miami-Dade school board on February 13 held its

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first reading of the new policies to implement Alliance-backed state laws. Meetings will also take place on March 13 and May 8.

Florida Citizens for Science is monitoring and reporting on the situation at the state level. The overall game plan of the Florida Citizens' Alliance was masterfully laid out by Sean Patrick Cooper in the Knight-funded investigative journal, *Undark*, which has zero interest in what it calls the euphemisms of science communications. Cooper's article, which ran November 2, 2018, uncovers how the Naples-based group "found a winning strategy [for a national agenda] in Florida, to challenge the teaching of mainstream climate science in schools."

Meanwhile, a January 25 op-ed by Cynthia Barnett and David Colburn in the *Tampa Bay Times* argues that DeSantis's environmental scorecard will not be measured by his initial bold acts -- no matter how welcome -- but by his sustained commitment. I would add, not just commitment on *some* items. That would be like saying you're trying to get healthy by washing down a salad with a Diet Coke.

Day in and day out, for the next four years or more, the governor must be holistic -- like nature itself. Even though the drivers of the system can be masked by its complexity, ultimately, it will be a political liability to try to separate them.

So what should we do? First, double down on support for Delaney Reynolds because framing the proposed real-life burdens and uncertainties as "increased access" to science education only bolsters her legal challenge.

At the same time, teachers and parents can organize around their own revisions to the curriculums for history, literature, performing arts, civics, and public speaking. Build lesson plans around the fodder offered here, and it could go a long way to holding adults accountable to the natural connections that natural science has to everything Floridians care about.

After all, in the end, you can't mess with Mother Nature.

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