

## 2017 PSR/Sacramento Essay Contest Submission

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On September 27th, 1938, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in an address to public school teachers, claimed that “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”(1) Seventy-seven years later, on February 26th, 2015, Senator Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma brought a snowball onto the Senate floor, claiming that the unseasonably cold temperatures disproved the existence of climate change once and for all. (2)

It is important to keep three facts in mind here. One is that Senator Inhofe, a climate change denier, was the Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works, tasked with setting US environmental policy, at the time he did this. (3) Another is that the Senator has been re-elected three times, most recently receiving over five hundred thousand votes and winning by a margin of 39% in 2014. (4) This was before his stunt on the Senate floor, but two years after he had published a book entitled "The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future." (5) The final, and most important fact is 2016 was the hottest ever, followed closely by 2015 and 2014, which continues the trend of global warming that started in the late 1800s and is almost certainly due in large part to carbon dioxide emissions and similar human activities. (6)

The question shouldn't be, “Why does Senator Inhofe deny established science?” The question is, “Why did 500,000 American voters know that the Senator denies established science and vote for him anyway?”

Elected officials reflect the values and beliefs that the electorate holds as important. In electing officials such as Senator Inhofe and President Trump, who has claimed in the past that “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive,”(7) the American people have sent a resounding message that science does not matter to them. Such ignorance is clearly a problem, and the only solution is a greater emphasis on education in our national policy.

The denial of climate change by elected officials is an egregious example of the failure of the people to make informed decisions in the voting booth, but it is far from the only one. In today's world, where “fake news” runs rampant on both sides of the political spectrum, it is more important than ever that young people are being taught how to think and read critically, how to distinguish truth from hyperpartisan spin, and how to support their opinions with facts instead of misleading rhetoric. American democracy demands nothing less of us.

## References

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