

Testimony of Alex Jasko, Student at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU)
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 18, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Alex Jasko, and I am a student of Physics, Astronomy, and Origins Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. I do not represent Case Western Reserve University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

Senate Bill 83, as it stands, explicitly defines climate change as a “controversial belief or policy.” While it is unfortunate that there are still those in this great state of Ohio who believe climate change and global warming to be “controversial,” this classification is deeply concerning and factually unsound. With the knowledge we possess today, a disbelief in climate change is akin to a disbelief in science and a lack of knowledge on the topic. For those who understand the science and data supporting anthropogenic climate change, there is no controversy.

It is simply a fact that the Earth is approximately 1.09°C warmer today than it was between 1850-1900. This is the fastest change in global temperature in at least the last 2,000 years. It is also unequivocally true that human-caused global warming can account for approximately 1.07°C of this heating, with the largest contribution coming from global greenhouse gas emissions. The largest share and growth in gross greenhouse gas emissions comes from fossil fuel combustion, and this “controversial” issue is not controversial at all.

Another indisputable fact is that human influence has contributed to sea levels rising by 0.2 meters since 1901 with the rate of rising only continuing to increase every year, putting the lives of approximately 3.3 to 3.6 billion people at risk who live in areas highly vulnerable to climate change. Climate change has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses to ecosystems all across the globe, and global warming has reduced food and water security for much of the world’s population.

Senate Bill 83 would demand that all state institutions of higher education require “faculty and staff” to “allow and encourage students to reach their own conclusion about all controversial matters,” including climate change, which is unequivocally occurring and human-induced. A belief in climate change should be encouraged as there is no logical argument denying its existence and impact on our society.

Senate Bill 83 requires that all courses be required to implement and follow “intellectual diversity rubrics” with “intellectual diversity” being defined as “multiple, divergent, and opposing perspectives,” regardless of if there exists a valid opposing perspective to an issue defined as controversial, such as climate change. This is a problem as it threatens the teaching and education on climate change, its causes, and its impacts: all of which are necessary to combat the global warming we experience today.

Senate Bill 83 also requires state institutions of higher education to “affirm and guarantee that it will not endorse, oppose, comment, or take action, as an institution, on the public policy controversies” such as climate change. This is a net negative for education as a whole since climate change is science backed by data and facts, as outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s AR6 Synthesis Report released on March 20th last month.

Senate Bill 83 would also effectively prevent climate change courses from being required courses for any degree path at a higher education institution, as a student must not be required to “express a given ideology, political stance, or view of a social policy” to attain a degree. Since climate change is defined as “controversial,” a course on climate change cannot express the science of the topic. The purpose of an exploratory, climate change science course, as required by many environmental studies and climate change majors, is to present the prevailing understanding, facts, and theories of a scientific discipline. Being forced to teach the “opposing perspectives” on this issue would only spread disinformation and go against the indisputable facts of climate change.

Senate Bill 83 also explicitly “prohibit[s] the institution from engaging in " activities such as “disinvestments” from fossil fuels in an effort to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change. The administration at Case Western Reserve University is currently undergoing a divestment campaign from fossil fuel and other carbon releasing companies to achieve its net-zero carbon emission goal. This divestment would be strictly forbidden in state institutions of higher education due to Senate Bill 83, even if a majority of the faculty and student population support the campaign. Divestment on this level is necessary to reduce the effects of climate change. Again, this is a problem.

Senate Bill 83, with its labeling of climate change as a “controversial belief or policy,” is not only harmful to the citizens of Ohio, but harmful to all people who call Earth home. Anthropogenic climate change and global warming are unequivocally occurring and will have drastic, negative consequences on our planet unless we, as citizens of Ohio, move to implement bills to combat climate change, not aid global warming as Senate Bill 83 would do.

Lastly, Senate Bill 83 would dissuade outstanding students from moving to Ohio as they pursue a degree of higher education. It also dissuades students currently living in the state from staying after they graduate. The climate change policy within the state is already behind that of many of the states in our great nation, but Senate Bill 83 would only make matters worse. The dissuasion of talented students from living in Ohio should be avoided as it contradicts Governor DeWine’s current efforts of encouraging more young people to move to Ohio.

I would like to thank Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee for their time and the opportunity to have this testimony read before you today.