Letter: Small wonder

Posted: Friday, March 11, 2016 12:00 am

Shanon Quinn's Page One article of March 5 about the state of science education in Idaho illustrates subjugation of scientific discourse to political agendas. Science teachers can't do their jobs because of public ignorance.

Climate change is an excellent example. Science magazine recently reported that among the 20 nations polled in 2014, the U.S. had the lowest percentage of people recognizing that climate change is human-caused: About half the adults in America believe human activity is the biggest cause of climate change, even though "more than 95 percent of active climate scientists attribute recent global warming to human causes."

Why is this?

The study of 1,500 public school science teachers from 50 states found most U.S. science teachers include climate science in their courses, but "their insufficient grasp of the science may hinder effective teaching."

"Many teachers repeat scientifically unsupported claims in class," the study states. Many teach "both" sides because they "might experience overt pressure from parents, community leaders, or school administrators not to teach climate change."

Thirty-one percent report "sending explicitly contradictory messages, emphasizing both the scientific consensus that recent global warming is due to human activity and that many scientists believe recent increases in temperature are due to natural causes."

How does this square with last year's Paris accord, where 196 nations agreed to collaborate on climate change? Many congressmen are threatening to bail from that agreement. Most presidential contenders deny either that the climate is changing or that it's human-caused.

Yet 21 Florida mayors get it. They've petitioned moderators in the upcoming presidential debate to bring climate change into the mix.

What's the world's largest polluter doing about it? China is putting a low-carbon "energy revolution" to combat climate change at the heart of its five-year economic plan.

Small wonder we're an international laughingstock.

Peter Haug

Colfax