

CREATIONISM IN 2001

A STATE-BY-STATE REPORT

This past summer marked the 75th Anniversary of the infamous Scopes “Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee, where biology teacher John Scopes was convicted for teaching evolution in a public high school in 1925. Today, the debate over teaching evolution in the public school science classroom still rages. Religious Right activists continue to push creationist agendas in many communities around the country, and with some success. This report documents recent creationist activity in 28 states in every region of the country except New England. It offers vivid proof that the longstanding battle to make science teaching conform to religious beliefs has followed us into the new century.

Over the past year or so, the media has focused its spotlight on the Kansas Board of Education’s decision in August 1999 to remove evolution, as well as the Big Bang theory and any mention of cumulative changes in the Earth or the age of the Earth, from the state science standards. One of the school board members, Steve Abrams, had worked closely with Tom Willis, a “young earth” creationist who is president of the Creation Science Association of Mid-America, to draft the revised standards that were accepted by the Board in a 6-4 vote. The outcome of the vote ignited outrage from educators, scientists, students and parents within the community and around the country.

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This past summer, the efforts of a coalition of scientists and pro-evolutionists, including People for the American Way, contributed to a resounding defeat of four of the ten school board members whose seats were up for re-election. In early August 2000, Kansans voted in the Republican primary to oust three out of the four school board members who voted for the revised standards last year. This outcome guaranteed that evolution would again return to the Kansas state science standards. Indeed, in February 2001, after the departure of the majority of the anti-evolution members, the Kansas State Board of Education voted 7-3 to approve new science standards that include both micro- and macro-evolution, as well as the Big Bang theory. The Pratt County School Board in Kansas, which had rewritten its science standards in November 2000 with the help of individuals who support the creationist theory of intelligent design, will now have to reverse itself to align its standards with the state board’s new revisions.

Frustrated by court rulings that hampered their efforts over the past several years, creationists such as those in Kansas have been seeking election or appointment to local school boards and textbook committees in the hopes of gaining control at the local level.

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Kansas was not an anomaly. The state board of education's August 1999 vote encouraged creationist efforts in other state legislatures and school boards. Two months after the Kansas vote, both Kentucky and Illinois removed the word "evolution" from their state's science standards and replaced it with "change over time." February and March of this year saw the introduction of anti-evolution bills in the Michigan and Arkansas state legislatures, and Pennsylvania is considering revisions to its state science standards that would include requirements that students be familiar with arguments against evolution. *See below for further details.*

Creationists also continue to work at the national level. In May 2000, fellows from the Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture held a briefing on "intelligent design" theory on Capitol Hill. Rep. Mark Souder, one of the program's sponsors, discussed the briefing and made the following remarks in the Congressional Record:

Intelligent design theory is upheld by the same kind of data and analysis as any other theory to determine whether an event is caused by natural or intelligent causes Today, qualified scientists are reaching the conclusion that design theory makes better sense of the data.

Rep. Souder thanked Phillip Johnson, one of the leading advocates for "intelligent design" theory, for drafting his response. Even President George W. Bush weighed in on the controversy during the campaign, indicating that he believes both evolution and creationism ought to be taught in the public school science classroom.

Last fall, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation presented "Good Science, Bad Science: Teaching Evolution in the States," a state-by-state survey of science standards. The report concluded that more than a third of all states do not do even a satisfactory job of requiring students to understand the fundamentals of evolution.

In addition to examining science standards in several states, this report presents an overview of creationists' activities over the past two years in school boards, legislatures, and libraries in 28 states around the country.

OVERVIEW OF CREATIONISTS' RECENT ACTIVITIES

Alabama

For the past several years, the state has required that all public school biology textbooks include a disclaimer stating that “evolution is a controversial theory.” In addition, the Board of Education’s current state science standards, last updated in July 1999, mandate that explanations of the origin of life “shall be treated as theory and not as fact.” *Orange County Register*, January 13, 1999. See also Alabama State Department of Education web page, <http://www.alsde.edu>, for current state science standards.

Recently, a committee of the Alabama Board of Education drafted new state science standards, entitled “Course of Study: Science” (COSS). The proposed standards employ the euphemism “change over time” in some places, rather than “evolution.” In addition, the standards require students to “analyze different *theories* of evolution,” which could open the door to permitting instruction about different brands of creationism. The Board of Education is expected to adopt the final version of COSS early this year. See National Center for Science Education’s Home Page, <http://ncseweb.org> to view an unofficial copy of the proposed standards.

Alaska

A member of the State Board of Education & Early Development reported at the December 1999 meeting that a resolution was introduced at the Alaska Association of Student Government meeting in October 1999, asking that biology classes cover Christian theories of life. The resolution did not pass. *Minutes from Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development Meeting*, December 9, 1999.

Arizona

In January 2000, the state House Committee on Federal Mandates and States’ Rights voted 4-2 in favor of a bill that would have required schools that teach students about evolution to also present the “scientific” evidence that does not support that theory. The bill (HB 2585), which was sponsored by Rep. Karen Johnson (R-Mesa), died before a floor vote. *Arizona Daily Star*, January 28, 2000; *Arizona Republic*, February 17, 2000.

The current state science standards, which were amended in August 1998, require a student to be able to distinguish between evidence supporting the theory of evolution and evidence that does not support the theory. *Arizona Science Standard 2: History and Nature of Science*. See also Arizona Department of Education’s web page, <http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/science>.

Arkansas

In March 2001, the state House Committee on State Agencies and Government Affairs approved a bill (HB 2548) that would require classroom instructors in state agencies, museums, zoos, public schools, and any political subdivisions of the state to instruct that evolution and related scientific concepts are “theories” rather than fact. During the committee hearings, Rep. Denny Altes responded to opponents by asking, “If we teach kids they were descended from monkeys, don’t you think they’ll act like monkeys?” The action came 20 years after the same state legislature passed a similar bill that was later struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional. The bill failed to pass the House in a full vote. *Chicago Tribune*, March 22, 2001. See also Arkansas State Legislature’s Home Page, <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us>.

California

According to the Ventura County Superintendent, Chuck Weis, at least one member of the county school board is interested in discussing the possibility of teaching creationism in the county’s public schools. *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 2000.

Colorado

In 1999, the Directors of Liberty Common School, a charter school, adopted a policy that topics such as evolution or the origin of life “extend beyond the scope of science” and thus would not be taught at the school. Parents complained to the Board of Education of the Poudre County School District, which oversees the charter school. On October 23, the board declared that the school had breached its contractual agreement to teach the Core Knowledge curriculum and ordered the school to lift its ban on teaching evolution. An administrative law judge will now decide whether the school district can force the charter school to include evolution in its science curriculum. *Associated Press Newswires*, August 28, 2000; *Denver Post*, October 24, 1999; *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, October 27, 1999.

The seven-member State Board of Education has drafted standards that do not require evolution to be covered on state science tests. The current Model Content Standards for Science states that they do not define any “student expectations related to the origin of life.” See also *Colorado Model Content Standards for Science*, Colorado Department of Education web page, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/download/pdf/science.pdf>.

The Chairman of the State Board of Education, Clair Orr, has reportedly revealed that he believes in divine creation. Because he believes that neither evolution nor creation theory can be proven, he argues that the two should be treated equally in the science classroom. *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, July 7, 2000.

Florida

In the election last fall, three candidates for the Palm Beach County School Board and four candidates for the Martin County School Board stated that they favor the teaching of creationism along with evolution in the public schools. Two of those candidates won the election. *Palm Beach Post*, November 8, 2000; *Palm Beach Post*, September 3, 2000.

Georgia

In February 2001, a bill (HB 391) introduced in the state legislature would give public school science teachers the option to present and critique evolutionary theory about the origins of life. See Georgia State Legislature's Web Page, <http://www.ganet.org/services/newleg/legsearch.cgi?year=2001&bill=HB391&highlight=evolution>.

Idaho

In October 1999, the state Board of Education considered, but voted 7-1 against, a proposal that would have added a requirement that students be able to "list two strengths and two weaknesses of the Theory of Evolution." *The Spokesman Review*, January 27, 2000. See also Idaho Board of Education Web Page, <http://www.sde.state.id.us/osbe/board.htm>.

Illinois

In October 1999, the *Chicago Tribune* revealed that in July 1997, the state Board of Education had removed the term "evolution" from the teaching guidelines and state science standards and replaced it with the phrase "change over time." The action was influenced by a conservative Christian group affiliated with James Dobson's Focus on the Family. *Chicago Tribune*, October 24, 1999.

Indiana

In January 2000, Rep. Gary Cook (D-Plymouth) and Rep. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn) co-authored and introduced a bill in the state legislature that would have permitted the governing body of a school corporation to require the teaching of various theories concerning the origin of life, including creation science. Rep. Cook told students at Plymouth High School: "We felt that if evolution is taught in the schools, the students should be given a choice of learning about creation, too." The bill was not given a hearing in the House Education Committee. *South Bend Tribune*, January 30, 2000. See also Indiana General Assembly Home Page, <http://www.state.in.us/legislative/>.

Kentucky

In September 1999, more than a dozen members of the Big Bone Baptist Church passed out approximately 475 anti-evolution books to students as they left Ryle High School in Union, Kentucky. The books, entitled *Refuting Evolution*, were published and donated by Answers in Genesis (AIG), the evangelical creationist organization known best for building a creation museum. AIG also passed out the books to students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. AIG proudly asserts that some of the Kansas school board members read the book before their infamous vote in August 1999; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 11, 1999. See Answers in Genesis home page, <http://aig.org>.

In October 1999, the state education department deleted the word “evolution” from the state science standards and replaced it with “change over time.” *Washington Times*, October 7, 1999; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, October 5, 1999.

In January 2000, a bill (HB 299) was introduced in the state legislature that would have created a new law defining an evolution theory that may be taught in public schools, as well as defining an evolution theory that shall not be included in the school curricula. The bill died in the House Education Committee. See Kentucky Legislature Home Page, <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us>.

Louisiana

The Supreme Court of the United States refused to review a case from the Fifth Circuit, striking down the Tangipahoa Parish school board’s decision to require that the teaching of evolution must be accompanied by a disclaimer mentioning “the biblical version of creation” and other teachings on life’s origins. *Associated Press*, June 19, 2000; *New York Times*, June 25, 2000.

The current state science standards require that students explore “*experimental*” evidence that supports the theory of the origin of life.” See Louisiana Board of Education Home Page, <http://www.lcet.doe.state.la.us>.

Maryland

Two candidates, Deran S. Eaton and Edward Pinchback Holland, III, who were running in the Charles County school board elections in the fall of 2000, favored teaching creationism as well as evolution in the public schools. Both candidates stated that they would like to see schools incorporate more religion into the curriculum. Eaton is vice chairman of Concerned Families of Maryland Coalition, a right-wing organization calling for smaller federal government involvement in education and the return of moral value instruction to public schools. Although not a member of the organization, Holland’s positions on education are in line with CFMC. Neither candidate won the election. *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2000; *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2000. See

also, Charles County Board of Education Web Page, <http://www.ccboe.com/board.direct.html>.

Michigan

In February 2001, a bill (HB 4382) was introduced in the state legislature that would require that creationism be taught in middle and high schools. Specifically, the bill requires that state science standards be revised such that evolution must be referred to as “an unproven theory” and that students must be required to explain competing theories, such as “that life is the result of the purposeful, intelligent design of a creator.” The bill was referred to the Education Committee. See *Detroit News*, March 19, 2001. See also Michigan State Legislature Home Page, <http://www.michigan.legislature.org>; *Associated Press*, March 23, 2000; National Heritage Academies Home Page, <http://www.heritageacademies.com>.

In Wyoming, MI, the ACLU has brought suit against the Vanguard Charter Academy, a charter school, on behalf of parents who complained that some teachers were presenting creation science in the classroom and that there had been other church-state violations. The charter school is managed by National Heritage Academies, which operates 27 charter schools in all. If true, the school’s teaching practices are in contravention of Michigan’s science curriculum framework, which include instruction on evolution. The lawsuit was dismissed by a federal judge in September 2000 and the ACLU is considering an appeal. *Associated Press*, September 27, 2000. See also Michigan Department of Education’s Curriculum Framework, <http://cdp.mde.state.mi.us/MCF/default.html>.

In the 1998-99 school year, a local pastor asked the Melvindale-Northern Allen Park school board in Wayne County to add creationism to the curriculum. As an alternative, the board purchased 19 creationist books for the school libraries rather than choosing to change the teaching practices. *Detroit Free Press*, October 23, 1999.

Minnesota

A local resident asked the Rosemont-Eagan-Apple Valley school for permission to donate a pair of books that challenge evolution and present intelligent design theory. The donation of the books in question, Phillip Johnson’s *Darwin on Trial* and Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box*, was denied by a vote of 6-1. *Salon.com*, December 13, 2000.

In 1999, Rodney LeVake, a public school teacher, sued Minnesota Independent School District 656 over his right to teach creationism in his biology class. LeVake had been removed from his position as a biology teacher in 1998. LeVake alleges that he was fired because the school believed that his religious views on Christianity conflicted with his ability to effectively teach evolution. The American Center for Law and Justice, founded by Pat Robertson, is

representing him. The case was dismissed in June 2000 after the court found that LeVake neglected his teaching responsibilities by rushing through the curriculum on evolution. LeVake has since filed an appeal. *Associated Press*, reprinted in *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, June 24, 2000; *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, August 14, 2000.

Mississippi

The state's current curriculum framework for science does not include any reference to evolution, natural selection, or even "change over time" in its Biology I or II standards. See Mississippi Department of Education Home Page, <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/curriculum/science/science2/htm>.

Nebraska

In October 1999, the State Board of Education voted 5-3 against a proposal from one board member to direct Department of Education staff to write a policy on teaching a variety of origin theories in science classrooms. In June 1999, the board had voted on science standards that left out any instruction on creationism. The October vote came on the heels of a decision by the State Department of Education to modify the state science standards such that evolution would be taught as a theory, rather than as fact. *Omaha World-Herald*, October 22, 2000; *Lincoln Independent*, October 10, 1999.

New Mexico

On January 31, 2000, a bill (SJM47) introduced in the state legislature would have required the state board of education "to allow the use of materials in the classroom for the study of creation theory." The bill passed the Senate's Education Committee, but no further action was taken. See New Mexico State Legislature Home Page, <http://legis.state.nm.us>.

In October 1999, the State Board of Education voted 13-1 to restore the teaching of evolution to the statewide science curriculum. In 1996, the board, led by ardent creationists, had voted to remove evolution from the science curriculum. The following year the state legislature attempted to respond to that action by introducing a bill that would have required that evolution be included in the curriculum. Although the bill passed the state Senate, it failed in committee in the House. *The Skeptical Inquirer*, January 1, 2000.

New York

Early in 2000, the sponsor of a charter school scheduled to open this past fall in Rochester, NY, announced that the school would teach creationism as an alternative to the theory of evolution. The school's sponsor, John R. Walker, is an assistant professor of business at Roberts Wesleyan, a Christian college there, and a pastor of the Faith Christian Center Church. Walker defended the action by explaining that, in his view, it is necessary to present creationism as an alternative

to evolution because the theory of evolution is unproven. The school, Rochester Leadership Academy, is one of 27 operated by National Heritage Academies of Grand Rapids, Michigan. *See* earlier discussion regarding teaching of creationism at Vanguard Academy, also operated by NHA, in Michigan. Senior Vice President Mark DeHaan acknowledges that the company did not mention creationism in the curriculum it presented to New York regulators, but stated that he thought it was “inappropriate to teach evolution as ‘This is reality.’ We have to teach evolution as a theory, and . . . there are other theories out there.” The school did not receive charter status. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 3, 2000.

Ohio

In March 2000, the State Board of Education considered but rejected a proposed amendment to the state science competencies that would have required the teaching of both intelligent design and evolution. *Columbus Dispatch*, March 10, 2000.

In May 2000, a bill (HB 679) was introduced in the state legislature that would have required that scientific evidence both supportive and not supportive of the evolution theory be included in public schools. The bill was assigned to the Education Committee and no further action was taken. *See* Ohio General Assembly Home Page, <http://www.legislature.state.oh.us>.

Oklahoma

In November 1999, the State Textbook Committee voted to require publishers to affix a disclaimer to any science book that discusses the theory of evolution. Specifically, the disclaimer states that evolution is a “controversial theory.” At least one publishing company refused to comply with the requirement. In February 2000, Attorney General Drew Edmundson issued an opinion that the State Textbook Committee had no authority to require that biology textbooks carry the disclaimer. *Associated Press*, February 2, 2000; *Tulsa World*, November 23, 1999; *Washington Times*, November 11, 1999.

Following on the heels of the Textbook Committee’s actions, on April 5, 2000, the state House unanimously approved an amendment to a Senate bill (SB 1139) that would require all state-approved science textbooks to acknowledge “that human life was created by one God of the Universe.” The House also approved legislation that would permit the State Textbook Committee to insert a one-page disclaimer to this effect. The legislation was laid over until the next session and no further action has been taken. In response, the University of Oklahoma Faculty Senate immediately released a public statement declaring its opposition to the proposed legislation. University of Oklahoma’s *Oklahoma Daily*, April 13, 2000; *Oklahoma Capital Bureau*, April 6, 2000. *See also* Oklahoma Legislature Home Page, <http://www.lsb.state.ok.us>.

Oregon

In March 2000, administrators at Central Oregon Community College investigated complaints about biology instructor Kevin P. Haley, including allegations that he allowed his religious beliefs to influence his teaching, such that he taught creationism whenever the theory of evolution was discussed. Administrators have recommended against renewal of his contract. Mr. Haley admitted to being a creationist, but denied the allegations. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 14, 2000.

Pennsylvania

This past fall, the Pennsylvania Department of Education issued a revised draft of Proposed Academic Standards for Science and Technology. The proposed standards include requirements that students analyze studies that support or do not support the theory of evolution. When the Department considered an earlier version of the standards that did not ask students to consider alternative theories to evolution, the Pittsburgh-based Creation Science Fellowship objected. The chairman of the organization, Andrew Wert, said he believes that evolution “is not a scientific theory.” *Patriot-News Harrisburg*, February 18, 2001; See Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Web Page, <http://www.pde.psu.edu/standard/stan.html>.

A Pennridge High School senior, Joe Baker, recently received permission to host a debate between a creationist and an evolutionist. Prior to receiving this permission, Baker had been asked by school officials to stop distributing a book by Kent Hovind, a Florida Young Earth creationist, entitled *Are You Being Brainwashed? Propaganda in Science Textbooks*. The debate comes on the heels of Baker’s proposal to the curriculum committee to include in science classes. *Allentown Morning Call*, November 8, 2000.

South Carolina

In October 2000, the Aiken County Review Board considered a proposal by a parent that would have allowed its schools to teach both evolution and creationism. In January 2001, the board voted 9-0 not to make creationism a part of the school district’s curriculum. The parent, Glenn Wilson, has stated that he would not let the decision go unchallenged and if his appeal of the board’s decision is denied, he has suggested that he will go to court. *Augusta Chronicle*, January 23, 2001; *Associated Press*, October 18, 2000.

Tennessee

A member of the Memphis School Board finally decided to drop his efforts to remove evolution, Darwinism, and the Big Bang Theory from public school science classrooms. The district has agreed to notify clergy when its teachers plan to address evolution so that clergy will have the opportunity to then talk about creationism. Another board member admits that evolution has always

been taught as a “theory” rather than as fact. *Associated Press*, November 27, 2000.

Washington

Roger DeHart, a high school biology teacher at Burlington-Edison High School, has been involved in a continuing battle over teaching creationism in his public school classroom. With the school board’s acquiescence, he planned to continue trying to challenge evolution when the four classes he teaches reached that unit at the end of the 1999-2000 school year. Although school officials have watered down his presentation, they have permitted him to continue to teach a portion of *Of Pandas and People*, the intelligent design textbook. The book is sold by the Foundation for Thought and Ethics, a Dallas group that focuses on Christian-based areas of academic concern. *ABA Journal*, November 1999 at 50-55.

Harold Hochstatter, a Republican state senator, was a candidate this past fall for governor of Washington state. In addition to opposing abortion, gay rights, and gun control, he is an ardent creationist. In the past, he has introduced legislation that would have required a warning label on science textbooks, stating that evolution is only a theory. Hochstatter did not win the election. *The Seattle Times*, August 23, 2000.

West Virginia

A parent in Kanawha County has filed a complaint with the school district over science textbooks that include references to evolution. The parent argues that the books violate a state law requiring that textbooks contain accurate information because they present evolution as fact, rather than as theory. *See Education Week*, November 29, 2000.

In May 2000, the Thomas More Center for Law and Justice, a Michigan-based conservative group, offered Kanawha County School Board members a deal: the Center would provide free legal services if the board voted to purchase an anti-evolution textbook for school teachers. Rob Muise, a lawyer for the organization, said, “We’ll be your shield against such [legal] attacks.” The school board declined. *Charleston Gazette*, May 19, 2000.

While a committee of the board had earlier recommended purchasing the book *Of Pandas and People*, they rescinded their support after the *Charleston Gazette* reported that several national science teacher groups opposed the book. The textbook committee includes several creationists. The school board later refused to use taxpayer money to buy copies of the textbook, but one of the board members said that she would donate copies of the book to the school libraries and the Thomas More Center offered to buy copies for the libraries as well. *Charleston Gazette*, June 16, 2000; *Charleston Gazette*, March 16, 2000, *Charleston Gazette*, May 19, 2000; *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, January 26, 2000.

In December 1999, school board members rejected a resolution that would have supported teachers who criticize Darwin's theory of evolution in the classroom. Karl Priest, a member of the textbook committee and a math teacher at Andrew Jackson Middle School, who is also a member of the Kanawha Creation Science Group, wore a gorilla mask at the board meeting to mock board members during the vote. *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, January 26, 2000.