

# Kansas Opens Classroom Debate on Evolution



By Meghan Kleppinger

“I believe in the Big Bang Theory. God spoke—and ‘Bang’ it was,” proclaimed my T-shirt—a small way of contributing in my Kansas eighth-grade classroom to the grassroots effort combating evolution.

I remember tearfully debating evolution vs. alternatives (my science teacher detested that shirt and my views), which makes the recent Kansas victory, more than a decade later, especially gratifying. The Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) voted in November to allow competing theories of the origins of man to be discussed in the classroom.

Kansan Linda Holloway can relate. Former chairman of the Kansas Board of Education and current Area Director for CWA of Kansas, Linda voted in 1999 to include this very element in the state’s science standards. She soon became the victim of the media’s slander, threats and cruelty.

In 2000, due to her stand on this issue, Linda lost her seat on the board. A year later, the board with newly elected members reversed the short-lived decision and Kansas curriculum returned to teaching science with only a naturalistic approach, which is based on Darwinian evolution.

In 2005, the issue appeared again within a divided Science Standards Committee. The majority wanted to keep the naturalistic approach only; the minority wanted revisions. From the hearings in May to the vote on November 8, CWA of Kansas actively followed the debate. The *Kansas City Star* reported on November 9 that Linda was one of the “few defenders” at the tense public comment meeting before the vote.

Following the board’s 6-4 vote in favor of revising the standards, the media wasted no

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time in repeating the 1999 scare-tactic/misinformation campaign. The headlines read, “Intelligent Design Must Be Taught,” referring to the theory that the complexity of life points to a higher intelligence. Critics ranted that these revisions impose “religion” on students and will compromise their education.

However, the term “Intelligent Design” is mentioned only *once* in the standards: “We also emphasize that the Science Curriculum Standards *do not include* Intelligent Design. . . . [T]hese standards neither mandate nor prohibit teaching about this scientific disagreement.”

Current chairman of the KSBE Dr. Steve Abrams noted in his press release following the vote, “Instead of discussing the issues of evolution, noisy critics go into attack mode and do a character assassination of anyone that happens to believe that evolution should actually be subject to critical analysis.”

What is the truth? What are the changes? How will the revisions affect the students of Kansas and the nation?

According to Francisco Ayala, Ph.D., a biology professor at the University of California, Irvine, the sky is falling. He remarked in an Associated Press (AP) article that, with these revisions, “The intellectual maturity of our students will be jeopardized. . . . [W]e are jeopardizing our nation.”

Jonathan Wells, Ph.D, an expert in molecular and cell biology, is a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute. After reviewing the revised standards, he wrote that “the definition of science proposed in the Minority Report [those who supported the revisions] is fully consistent with definitions used by all other states in the U.S. By contrast, the defini-



*CWA of Kansas Area Director Linda Holloway, above, and State Director Judy Smith have been involved in the evolution debate in their state since 1999.*

tion of science currently used in the Kansas standards and defended by the Majority is idiosyncratic and out of step with current educational practice.” Kansas has taken a step forward, not backward. Rather than allowing science to be

explained by nature alone, it allows for investigation, research, testing and explanation based on observation.

The issue is academic freedom and bringing the Kansas science curriculum up to date. Also in the AP article, CWA’s State Director in Kansas and a registered pharmacist, Judy Smith, said, “Teaching the controversy will enhance Kansas students’ ability to look at the

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evidence, learn how to gain more information and ultimately make their own decision about origins. Academic freedom is what we hope for in the education of our children.”

Parents, students and teachers have been fighting for decades over the right for students to study criticisms of evolution. With victories like the one in Kansas, those involved in the debate in other states should take heart. ■

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