



EVOLUTION: THE SECOND ROUND

Ohio Board Votes to "teach the controversy" about Evolution

Grass-roots activism made the difference!

In a stunning victory for the intelligent design movement the Ohio State Board of Education voted recently to require critical analysis of Darwin's theory of evolution, paving the way to true "critical thinking" skills for our children in school. This was truly a **grass-roots effort** in that the State Board of Education was not comprised of a majority of members willing to correct evolutionary bias in instructional and assessment objectives. However, the unprecedented outpouring of concern from citizens and scientists who wanted students to be allowed to understand the controversy between creation by an intelligent designer and evolutionary theory turned the tide in Ohio.

A Zogby poll conducted in May, 2002 of 702 adults in Ohio showed an overwhelming (65%) of those polled wanted students to be taught both evolution **and** the scientific evidence against it. The poll asked: "When Darwin's theory of evolution is taught in school, students should also be able to learn about scientific evidence that points to an intelligent design of life." Seventy-eight percent agreed or somewhat agreed with that statement. The indicator / benchmark that was agreed upon by the State Board in Ohio was: students will "describe how scientists continue to investigate and critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory." The clarifying language states: "The intent of this indicator / benchmark does not mandate the teaching or testing of intelligent design." Another change was the definition of science which now reads: "Science is a systematic method of continuing investigation, based on observation, hypothesis testing, measurement, experimentation, and theory building, which leads to more adequate explanations of *natural phenomena*." (*Emphasis added*) This is a key element in that the former definition was "*natural explanations*" rather than adequate explanations of natural phenomena.

The naturalistic worldview holds that all things come from natural causes, leaving out any theories that would suggest that intelligent design had a hand in the creation of the universe. Naturalism implies by its very nature that nature alone is the progenitor of life. Nature creates nature. The implication of the Board's decision is that the state of Ohio will not "mandate the teaching or testing of intelligent design; it will permit it as a local decision. It was not the intention of the board to place a prohibition on the teaching of intelligent design, even though a few board members would have preferred to do so," states Melanie Elsey, who is part of the Intelligent Design Network. Intelligent Design may be taught based on local input, but will not be

mandated nor will students be tested on intelligent design theories. The key factor here is that local control is re-established in this controversial area and that intelligent design theories have reached their own "benchmark" of legitimacy.

What has been the impact so far?

After the Board's preliminary report in October that indicated "an intention to adopt" the new science standards, many school districts called to say they were allowing students to openly debate intelligent design.

How does this compare to Kansas?

In Kansas, when the debate first appeared, the headlines screamed, "Kansas **bans** the teaching of evolution" which could not have been further from the truth. Some on the Kansas State Board of Education wanted to do the same thing that Ohio did . . . allow students open information about all of the current theories on origins. From the beginning of the debate in Kansas, CWA's position was that the sensitive issue of origins must be dealt with in an objective way, without coercing students into believing a worldview that was contrary to their beliefs. We also felt that local control was essential in that local school boards, etc. are far more responsive to their constituencies and understand their community's values and beliefs much better than the state or the federal government. We felt from the beginning that students must have the opportunity to explore all explanations for origins; this is essential for academic freedom as well as giving the student critical thinking skills that he/she will need.

Unfortunately Kansans did not get the whole truth; instead they were barraged with misinformation that led them to believe that Kansas economy, industry and scientific endeavors would be harmed if Kansas adopted a view that allowed all theories to be discussed. However, as it has often been in the past, Kansas was at the forefront of a battle that is going to be won, thanks to the tireless efforts of a few on the Kansas State Board of Education who felt that students' right to learn was more important than the science establishment's missionary zeal for their worldview.

Linda Holloway, former chairman of the Kansas State Board of Education, said, "It appears that the Ohio State Board of Education was more interested in science and academic freedom than the radical evolutionists in Kansas—and around the world for that matter. It is encouraging to know that the horrendous ridicule and vilification that the Kansas State Board of Education received for allowing local districts to decide how to teach origins was not wasted. That loud controversy sparked interest in this issue, and the issue is still alive and well! Kudos to the Ohio State Board!"