



## Kansas Science Standards Promote Critical Thinking

By Linda Holloway

Congratulations to the six members of the Kansas State Board of Education who voted to pry open the lid of evolution. Steve Abrams, John Bacon, Kathy Martin, Connie Morris, Iris Van Meter and Ken Willard, each stood up against seemingly endless attacks on their integrity and their character. Very few of their critics, if any, were willing to discuss the contents of the standards. Instead, they chose to accuse the six of trying to force their religious views on the children of Kansas while ignoring the fact that religion is not in the standards.

The members handled themselves with dignity and patience as the four opponents to the standards complained about the timing of the vote, religion in the standards and becoming "a laughingstock of the nation and the world."

Carol Rupe said, "It's a sad day for Kansas . . . I wish you wouldn't change science to fit your faith."

Steve Abrams replied, "It's a great day for Kansas students. It's one of the best things that can be done!"

John Bacon said, "It's great for science because it gets rid of dogma taught in classrooms."

Janet Waugh said that people at national meetings "laugh at Kansas."

Ken Willard said, "I went to a national meeting, and no one laughed at me . . . What has happened here today is a concerted effort to make a non-issue the issue – that we've inserted religion. It's not in the standards . . . What is it about logical analysis of science that is a threat to anyone?"

Sue Gamble said, "We appear to be approving a pig in a poke," (referring to the fact that the Department of Education staff would have a bit more work to do as a result of the vote.)

Steve Abrams responded, "That's irrelevant. You're not going to approve the standards anyway."

The standards allow students to learn about evolution and its scientific criticisms. Creation is never mentioned in the standards. Intelligent Design (ID) is mentioned only in the introduction which clarifies that the standards neither encourage nor prohibit teaching ID. If one's only source of information is from the mainstream media, he or she would think the standards discourage teaching evolution. In fact, they encourage teaching much more about the subject – more than opponents want taught. You can read the standards for yourself at [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org).

Governor Kathleen Sebelius immediately rebuked the board for its decision, and soon after that, remarked that the makeup

of the board needed to change. Next year, five members will be up for reelection, and four of them voted for the standards: John Bacon, Olathe; Connie Morris, St. Francis; Ken Willard, Hutchinson and Iris Van Meter, Thayer. Only one who voted against the standards, Janet Waugh, Kansas City, is up for reelection. The campaign season is likely to get ugly.

Another target of the liberal/moderate board members, educators and media is the new Commissioner of Education, Bob Corkins. The conservative members voted to hire him, so their opponents attack the decision as well as Mr. Corkins. He is not an educator, but he was the head of a think tank and lobbied in Topeka for 20 years. He worked against raising taxes and weighed in on the Supreme Court's decision to direct the Legislature to give more money to schools. The media paints him as "anti-education" because he dared to suggest parents deserve a choice in education for their children – in the form of expanded charter schools. (These are public schools that have their own boards and focus.) He contends that competition will improve education for all children. He also has made mention of the benefit of vouchers at one time.

Three of the liberal/moderate members of the board spent the first part of the meeting on Nov. 9 drilling the new commissioner. They questioned his hiring a transition team leader. One member was quite upset that he met with some people in her district, and she wasn't notified. Another demanded to know why he talked about charters because the board hadn't voted on that. Mr. Corkins handled himself in a professional manner, answering the barrage of questions until the Chair cut them off for the Citizens Open Forum.

Bringing in a commissioner with a fresh perspective is just what Kansas education needs. Bob Corkins shows his willingness to learn about education by bringing in a transition team for two months; this is not unusual in other businesses when leadership changes. In addition, he brings vast experience in working with legislators and laws and he well understands the school funding formula.

### Prayer and Action

Pray for the board as they deal with the aftermath of their votes.

Contact the brave six members and encourage them. Let them know you appreciate their promotion of honesty and good science in the science standards. You can get their contact information on the same Web site as the one with the standards.

Pray for Commissioner Corkins.

Contact the Commissioner with encouragement and your thoughts on school choice.