

Texas Embroiled in Debate Over Evolution Education

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[] A battle is brewing in Texas over how the theory of evolution is taught from science books throughout the state.

This summer, as members of the board of education decide textbook curriculum for the next decade, they will have to decide whether both the “strengths and weaknesses” of evolution will be taught to students attending Texas public schools, *The New York Times* reported.

Proponents of teaching both sides of the theory say it will give students a well-rounded view of evolution, while those opposed say that teaching the “weaknesses” is an attempt by those with religious objections to undermine evolution.

According to the *Times*, the pending decision by the Texas board of education could affect schools around the nation because Texas is one of the nation’s biggest textbook buyers and manufacturers do not like producing different versions of the same material.

The debate in Texas comes on the heels of *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, a provocative documentary released nationwide in April that suggests science professionals are not allowed to discuss evidence of design in the universe. It follows actor and social commentator Ben Stein as he travels the globe interviewing educators and scientists who claim they were denied tenure and even fired for questioning Darwinism.

In addition to the critically acclaimed movie, lawmakers in several U.S. states have introduced academic freedom bills

that would allow educators to challenge flaws in Darwinian evolution with objective scientific data.

"There is a nationwide trend going on in which people are becoming aware of the fact that scientists have been persecuted because they questioned Darwinism and that there is a need for protections of teachers and scientists to challenge evolution," said Casey Luskin, program officer for public policy and legal affairs at the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based intelligent-design think tank.

"The movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* is raising consciousness about this problem," he said, "and there is now a nationwide movement to protect teachers who challenge evolution."

More than 700 scientists from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and from universities such as Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rice and UCLA recently signed Discovery Institute's "Scientific Dissent From Darwinism" list.

By signing the document, the prominent scientists and professors acknowledged that they are skeptical of the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. They call for a careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory.

Patricia Reiff, a professor of physics and astronomy at Rice University and the director of the Rice Space Institute in Houston, said she agreed to have her name added to the list because there are certain events in the evolutionary process that are mathematically "quite improbable."

Reiff is convinced by evidence for evolution and does not discuss religion in the classroom, but said "life from nonlife is very, very improbable."

She added: "Astronomer Fred Hoyle once said, 'It's like having an explosion in a junk yard and ending up with a 747.' I think there is an option for people of faith to say, 'Look, there

are certain places in the evolutionary structure where the hand of God can be seen.' "

Although many Christian observers praised *Expelled*, it was met with sharp criticism from both scientists and mainstream media. After the documentary's release, John Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono, and his sons Sean and Julian, filed suit in a federal court. The action attempted to force filmmakers to remove a clip of Lennon's 1971 song "Imagine" from a segment of the documentary that apparently portrays how contemporary culture imagines a world without "the hand of God." The highlighted portion of the song included the lyrics: "Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too."

However, the court ruled June 2 in favor of the filmmakers, pointing to a legal doctrine known as "fair use."

This year, lawmakers in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Michigan, South Carolina and Missouri introduced academic freedom bills that would allow public schoolteachers to present diverse views on biological and chemical origins.

"What these bills would do is give protections to teachers and students that they could not be reprimanded or terminated because they engaged in a robust discussion, not on creationism or intelligent design, but just on the scientific strengths and weaknesses of evolution," said John Stemberger, president and general counsel of the Florida Family Policy Council, which joined Stein at a March press conference to support the state's Academic Freedom Act.

Stein and the producers of *Expelled* hope lawmakers in all 50 states will introduce similar legislation.

"People don't like to be told what is obviously true is not true," Stein said. "People don't like to be told that the God who made them in a loving way helps them and is their shepherd every single moment of every day doesn't exist. We're sick and tired of being pushed around, and it stops now." **—Troy Anderson with Felicia Mann**