

Biblical Win in Texas Could Impact School Children Across the Nation

The Texas State Board of Education, whose decisions can have national ramifications, on Friday approved nearly 100 textbooks despite criticism the books exaggerated the influence biblical figures had in forming the U.S. system of government.

The Republican-controlled 15-member body voted along party lines to approve the use of the textbooks for all ages of students in the second-most populous U.S. state, with about 5 million children in the public school system.

Once textbooks are approved in Texas, they are often sold nationally and used for years in classrooms across the country.

"I don't think there is any reason to fear these books," board member Thomas Ratliff told reporters. "I think by and large they are going to be very good books."

Critics say the social studies and history textbooks that were approved overemphasize the role that Christianity and biblical figures such as Moses played in the formation of the nation's founding documents while giving little attention to constitutional provisions against the state establishing religion.

They also say world geography textbooks downplay the role that armed conquest played in the spread of Christianity and misrepresent fundamental points of other major religions.

"The State Board of Education and these textbooks have collaborated to make students' knowledge of American history a casualty of the culture wars," said Emile Lester, a political science professor at the University of Mary Washington in

Virginia and a critic of textbooks under consideration.

Some conservatives have criticized the textbooks for not giving more attention to what they said was the role violence played in the spread of Islam.

The more than 1,000 Texas public school districts can choose their own books and materials, but most follow the state-approved list.

Barbara Cargill, board chairwoman and a conservative, said opposition from liberals failed to “erase the role Christianity has played in the founding of this nation.”

Reporting by Jim Forsyth in San Antonio and Jon Herskovitz in Austin; editing by Lisa Von Ahn and Eric Beech