

Evangelicals Win Battle in War Over Evolution in Texas Biology Book

Social conservatives on the Texas State Board of Education have delayed approval of a high school biology textbook, pending a review by experts, citing concerns about the book's lessons on evolution.

In the latest episode of a lengthy battle by evangelicals in Texas to insert Christian and biblical teachings into public school textbooks, the board on Thursday blocked the book's approval.

A volunteer reviewer concluded that the assertions in Pearson's *Biology*, which include lessons on natural selection and the Earth's cooling process, are "errors" that need to be corrected by publisher Pearson Education, one of the nation's largest producers of school textbooks, board members said.

The opinion of the unidentified reviewer, who is part of a citizens' panel that looks over the texts, and the fact that Pearson is disputing it, led to the delay.

The board is expected on Friday to turn the matter over to a panel of experts to examine the purported errors and make a final recommendation.

Pearson declined to comment early on Friday.

"Publishers of several other books agreed to make the changes we pointed out," said David Bradley, a leader of the social conservatives on the board, referring to earlier efforts to change other science texts. "But we have one publisher of one book that says they are not making changes."

Because Texas is so large—second in population only to

California—textbook selection here influences schoolbooks that are also sold in other states.

While the state's more than 1,000 school districts are not required to use the books approved by the board, most do.

Two years ago, conservatives pushed for changes in history textbooks, including one that would have downplayed Thomas Jefferson's role in American history for his support of the separation of church and state. That effort was unsuccessful.

During the Thursday night debate, board member Thomas Ratliff accused conservative members of the review panel of "holding this book hostage" for political reasons and said they had "hijacked" the approval process.

"You say that the sky is blue, but I say it's green, and that's a factual error, and we would find ourselves here, at 11:00 at night, voting on what to do," a visibly frustrated Ratliff said.

Delaying the vote for further review is a good idea because the "current education establishment" does not listen to parents who, in addition to scientists, should have a say in what their kids are taught in school, said Cathie Adams, head of the socially conservative Texas Eagle Forum.

"One reason we have so many problems in public education, is because we're not seeking parental input," Adams said.

But Dan Quinn, a textbook analyst with the liberal activist group Texas Freedom Network, said debates like that marginalize the board.

"If the state board continues to politicize the books as they have in the past, at some point the school districts might just throw up their hands and say, 'We've had enough,'" Quinn said. "'We will choose on our own what books we want,' and the publishers will just end up going around this board."

Edited by Karen Brooks and Gunna Dickson

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