

TFN Takes on Radical Ed Board



Anyone searching for a textbook example of how to craft bad public policy need look no further than the intensely politicized Texas State Board of Education.

The **Texas Freedom Network** has been monitoring – and fighting – the abuses of the board’s far-right faction for more than a decade. Because of that faction’s growth, work on statewide curriculum standards and textbook adoptions for public schools has become treacherous. Bitter political battles divide the board on issues such as religion, science and even how to teach students to read and write.

Those battles have worsened in the year since Gov. Rick Perry appointed Don McLeroy – a Bryan dentist and leader of the board’s far-right faction – as board chairman.

“The public deserves better than what is coming from this highly polarized group that keeps getting more and more dysfunctional,” writes the San Antonio Express-News.

Contempt for Rules and Teachers

The board’s deep divisions were on full display this spring when far-right members rammed through a new curriculum for teaching reading and writing to the next generation of Texas schoolchildren. Far-right board members secretly pieced together parts of the new curriculum overnight and slipped it under other members’ hotel doors just hours before the final vote. That contempt for rules and informed debate has enraged moderate board members, but they lack the votes to do much about it.

A coalition of teachers, appalled by the tactics of the McLeroy majority, argues that the new curriculum ignores

how much the state’s diverse population has changed in recent decades. They also say it ignores serious research by education experts on the best way to teach schoolchildren how to read and write. Yet McLeroy and other faction members – none of whom are professional educators – have arrogantly disregarded the pleadings of classroom teachers. Rather than hide their contempt, some faction members have even bragged about “spanking” the teachers.

Contempt for the Legislature

Religious extremists on the board have also shown their contempt for the law. Last fall they rejected a math textbook without any stated reason even though lawmakers in 1995 passed legislation forbidding such censorship.

The law was designed to stop board members from censoring textbooks based on their own personal or political beliefs. McLeroy, however, has already declared that the rejection of that math textbook sets a precedent for how the board will approach textbook adoptions in the future.

Far-right board members have also ignored a legislative requirement for detailed, rigorous curriculum standards in public school classes about the Bible’s influence in history and literature. At TFN’s urging, lawmakers approved that requirement as a safeguard against those who would use the classes to promote their own religious views over everyone else’s.

TFN Fights Back

TFN has been leading efforts to educate the public about the unfolding disaster on the board. We are helping teachers be heard in the news media and are alerting grassroots activists about how they can support the efforts of board moderates. Finally, TFN is working with legislators on how to reverse the state board’s abuse of power.

All of these efforts are crucial for success in the fight ahead over science curriculum standards. Read more about that looming battle on pages 4-5.

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A note from President Kathy Miller

The dog days of summer are usually a good time to relax, spend time with family and recharge. But this summer, the **Texas Freedom Network** is also preparing for a loaded fall agenda of events.



Our political team sent out questionnaires to congressional, legislative and State Board of Education candidates on the November general election ballot. The questionnaires quiz candidates about their positions on a list of issues important to TFN's mission supporting public education, religious freedom and individual liberties.

Those survey questions reflect the mainstream values we all share. Based on answers we get as well as past voting records, TFN will soon make candidate endorsements for the general election.

But because of our federal nonprofit status, we can't release those endorsements to everyone. To receive TFN's candidate endorsements, you must be a dues-paying member and formally affirm your membership. If you are not already a formal member, you can become one by going to www.tfn.org or calling 512-322-0545 today.

Our **TFN Education Fund** staff is working on two research projects that reinforce our support for sound science and health education in public schools. This fall we will release a one-of-a-kind report on what Texas public schools teach about sex education. This new report will represent ground-breaking research. Not even the Texas Education Agency tracks what our public schools teach about this critical health education issue.

A second report this fall will look at what Texas science professors think about the controversy over teaching religious concepts like "intelligent design"/creationism in public school biology classes. That report will come out as the State Board of Education debates a revision of the state's science curriculum standards and what students should learn about evolution.

Finally, we have launched our new blog – **TFNinsider.org**. By modernizing our online presence in this way, we hope to attract more online media consumers and to give members like you an opportunity to scratch beneath the surface of our issues in a way that can't be done with a seven-second sound bite on the local news. I hope you'll check out **TFNinsider.org** for postings and leave your own comments.

Our new blog is just one more way we are trying to keep Texans informed about public policies that affect our lives and address our values. We couldn't do any of that without your support. Enjoy the rest of your summer, and look for all of TFN's exciting projects in the coming months.



TFN Welcomes New Board Member Dan McLendon

TFN gives a warm welcome to Dr. Dan McLendon as the newest member of our Board of Directors. Dan is an expert in the field of public education and is currently president of Dan McLendon & Associates. He previously served as superintendent of the Round Rock and West Orange-Cove school districts. Dan also is a member of St. David's Episcopal Church in Austin, where he serves as an usher, greeter and as a member of the steering committee for St. David's Forum. He and his wife, Connie, have five children and five grandchildren.



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FAITH & FREEDOM

speaker series

Rev. Jim Wallis Tells TFN Members: "I think we've got a chance to shake up politics!"

The Rev. Jim Wallis, a best-selling author and head of Sojourners/Call to Renewal, returned to Texas as the featured speaker at the **Texas Freedom Network's** Faith & Freedom Speaker Series in May. Speaking to a packed house of more than 500 people, Wallis brought a message of hope: the agenda of the faith community – even the evangelical community – is changing dramatically to include issues such as poverty, environmental care and climate change, war and peace.

Rev. Wallis' new book *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in Post-Religious Right America* predicts that a new spiritual "revival" could spark real social and political change – change that could significantly impact politics in the 2008 election.

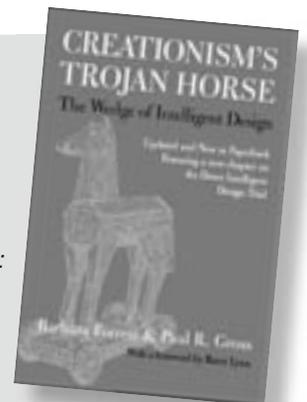
Rev. Jim Wallis speaks before more than 500 people at Austin's First United Methodist Church in May. This was Wallis' second appearance at a TFN Faith & Freedom Speaker Series event.



Next Stop – DALLAS!

Dr. Barbara Forrest

author of *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*



DALLAS
November 11 • 6:00 p.m.
Southern Methodist University

Dr. Forrest is one of the world's foremost experts on "intelligent design" and other creationist attempts to undermine the teaching of evolution. Her evening presentation will serve as a warning to Texas:

"Why Texans Shouldn't Let Creationists Mess with Science Education"

Keep an eye on www.tfn.org for more information about this exciting event in Dallas.



TFN Stands Up for Science as Evolution

The **Texas Freedom Network** has been warning that religious extremists on the State Board of Education are set this year to undermine the teaching of evolution in public schools. Now the national news media are focusing on the growing debate over what the next generation of Texas students will learn in their 21st-century science classes.

Prominent stories in the *New York Times* and other major newspapers have revealed the religious right's strategy: require that public schools teach the "strengths and weaknesses" of evolution. That strategy is designed to undermine the science behind evolution and make room for religious concepts like biblical creationism/"intelligent design" in science classrooms.

Yet mainstream scientists have repeatedly debunked phony "weaknesses" fabricated by creationists. Evolution, scientists say, is the foundation for learning about all of the biological sciences. Biblical creationism/"intelligent design," on the other hand, is unsupported by even a shred of scientific evidence.

What Are Extremists on the State Board Saying about Evolution?

"(There are) two systems of science. You've got the creationist system and a naturalist system."

-- Texas State Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, R-Bryan, in the *New York Times*

"Any real scientist understands there are major weaknesses in evolution."

-- State board member Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio, in the *San Antonio Express-News*

"Students need to jump to their own conclusions."

-- State board member David Bradley, R-Beaumont, in the *San Antonio Express-News*

"There are others who think their ancestors were apes. That's okay. But I'm going to vote the right way."

-- David Bradley, in the *Dallas Morning News*

What Are Others Saying about Science in Texas?

Newspapers in Texas and across the country have been editorializing on the growing debate over teaching evolution in Texas.

The New York Times

"If the creationist view prevails in Texas, students interested in learning how science really works and what scientists really understand about life will first have to overcome the handicap of their own education."

HOUSTON ★ CHRONICLE

"What students really need is to be able to study science from materials that have not been hijacked by creationists whose personal agenda includes muddying the science curriculum. . . . All people are entitled to their private religious beliefs, but nobody is entitled to use the state's public education system to promote them."

San Antonio Express-News

"A belief in intelligent design is a matter of faith, not science. If teachers believe in it, they should confine their lectures to their own kids in their own homes."

Waco Tribune-Herald

"A lot of what is portrayed as a 'weakness' in evolution theory is really a misrepresentation of it. . . . The central problem is that those who wish to attach qualifications to evolution aren't really driven by science but by their faith."

Debate Grabs National Attention

Creationism Goes to College

The fight over teaching evolution isn't confined to our state's public schools. Now creationism is going to college.

This spring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board considered an application by the Dallas-based Institute for Creation Research (ICR) to offer master's of science education degrees. The ICR teaches that the Bible's story of creationism is both scientific and fact.

Granting state-approved master's degrees in science education would have given the ICR's anti-science agenda dangerous credibility. Until January, it appeared that the institute might gain that state approval.

The **Texas Freedom Network** swung into action, alerting news media and pro-science activists across Texas. TFN activists contacted the Coordinating Board, voicing their concerns about undermining science education in Texas.

The resulting attention forced the Coordinating Board to slow down and review the facts more closely. Then in April, the full board wisely rejected ICR's application.

Unfortunately, the battle isn't over. Representatives of the ICR have appealed the decision. If that appeal fails, they have also threatened to file a lawsuit, claiming "viewpoint discrimination."

Clergy Stand Up for Science

Clergy affiliated with the **Texas Faith Network** are also adding their voices to the campaign for a 21st-century science education in the state's public schools.

In February, clergy in Texas and across the country took part in Evolution Weekend, reminding their congregations that there is no conflict between faith and supporting a sound science education.

The Texas Faith Network, which includes mainstream religious leaders from around the state, partnered with the Clergy Letter Project to promote Evolution Weekend. Clergy in all 50 states – including more than 40 congregations in Texas – delivered sermons, lead discussions and hosted speakers, among other activities, over the weekend. They encouraged congregants to engage in meaningful discourse about the importance of both religious faith and sound science.

Clergy may sign on to TFN's "Clergy Statement on Evolution" at www.tfn.org.



JOIN THE STAND UP FOR SCIENCE CAMPAIGN!

You can support a 21st-century science education for Texas public school students by joining the **Texas Freedom Network's** Stand Up for Science campaign. Learn more about the campaign at www.tfn.org. You can do three things to help:

- ① Sign on to the Stand Up for Science petition online at www.tfn.org. TFN will keep you informed and provide specific actions you can take to defeat the religious right's war on science.
- ② Become a postcard captain and distribute postcards others can use to sign on to the Stand Up for Science campaign.
- ③ Host a house party or organize another event to educate friends and others about the Stand Up for Science campaign. TFN will provide campaign materials and an award-winning video documentary about the issue that you can present at your event.

To learn more about these and other opportunities, call our office at 512-322-0545 or send an e-mail to tfn@tfn.org.

TFN Celebrates Freedom in Dallas!

Supporters joined **Texas Freedom Network** staff and board members at the beautiful home of Marguerite Steed Hoffman in May at our annual Dallas members' reception. More than 150 guests gathered to toast TFN's many accomplishments and to celebrate the mainstream values we hold so dear. We are extremely grateful to Marguerite for her continued generosity. And thank you to all our Dallas-area sponsors!



Top right: Helen Frank, Maggie Radford, John Solana, Donna Peterson and Cynthia Yung



Left: Jamie & Carl Weisbrod with Marcy Helfand



Right: Carolyn Brown, TFN Board members Lynn Markle and Audrey Kaplan, Colon Brown

Houston Supporters Gather for Amazing Evening!

Ginni and Richard Mithoff graciously hosted TFN's annual members' reception in Houston in early May. TFN staff and board members were joined by 200 guests – longtime supporters as well as many new faces – to celebrate religious freedom and individual liberties. This event was our most successful to date in Houston. Thank you to all our Houston-area supporters and especially to Ginni and Richard Mithoff for generously hosting the incredible event.



Left: Karen Wood, Barbara Rodes, Ginni Mithoff and Barbara Woolhandler



Right: Bob Zinn, Larry Buck and Aubrey Farb

Welcome back, Judie!

Judie Niskala rejoins the TFN staff as the new outreach coordinator. Judie is a native Texan who grew up in Corpus Christi. Most recently she has worked as the field associate for Equality Texas. While earning her master's degree in women and gender studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Judie served as a TFN intern, conducting important research on a variety of projects and reports and assisting with member outreach. We are thrilled to have Judie back at TFN!



TFN Summer Interns: Onnalita Maniccia and Courtney O'Dell

Onnalita Maniccia (right), a graduate student at Texas State University-San Marcos and Courtney O'Dell, a graduate student at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, have worked as research interns for TFN this summer. Onnalita, a native Austinite, is currently pursuing her master's degree in health education at Texas State University, where she will be teaching two undergraduate classes this fall. Courtney's academic work includes women's studies and religion. Both have been key members of TFN's research team this summer.



Garrett Mize and Andrew Walker, both undergraduate students at the University of Texas at Austin, are continuing as TFN interns. Garrett and Andrew came to TFN in fall 2007.

Tributes and Memorials

In Honor of

Lillian Gerson

by Rhonda & Paul Gerson

Sarah Gerson

by Rhonda & Paul Gerson

**Elsie Pastner Smith
and proud parents Becky
Pastner & Steven Smith**

*by Judy Irving
& Steve Pastner*

In Loving Memory of

Thomas M. Aimar, III

by D. Ford Stuart

Earl Dachslager

*by Pablo Okhuysen &
Mary Gleason*

Mr. Madison Ottinger

by Annette Briggs

K Edward Quinn

*by Mara LaViola
Deedee & David Ostfeld*

Remembering Jordan Nadler

TFN lost a dear friend and a valued colleague this June when Jordan Nadler passed away suddenly. A student at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT-Austin, Jordan joined the staff of TFN as a research intern last September, working through both the fall and spring semesters. Jordan's dry sense of humor and commitment to fairness and civil rights made her an instant part of the TFN family. We already miss her terribly, but we are grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside such a talented, caring young woman. Thank you, Jordan.



Goodbye, Ian and Bren!

Ian Davis says goodbye to TFN after two years as outreach coordinator. Ian was instrumental in expanding the organization's visibility and event outreach capabilities.

He developed the TFN Legislative Academy and helped found the TFN student chapter at the University of Texas at Austin. Ian worked tirelessly at many events, meetings, and functions to make sure every person in the room knew how to get involved and make a difference for Texas. Thank you for all of your work Ian, and good luck in your new endeavors!



Bren Gorman spent the last year working as a TFN research and communications intern. Bren provided invaluable research to all of the newest reports. She also provided assistance to the outreach department, including support with the Houston Leadership Development Institute. Bren is currently in DC working at her next internship and will return to Austin

this fall to complete her master's degree at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT-Austin.

TFN Welcomes Our Youngest Member



Elsie Pastner Smith has been fighting the religious right since birth – April 16, 2008. TFN staff presented her proud parents Becky Pastner – former TFN deputy director – and Steven Smith with this special T-shirt to start her activist career on the right foot.



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