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FREEDOM
NETWORK

NETWORK NEWS

A MAINSTREAM VOICE TO COUNTER THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT · WWW.TFN.ORG · SUMMER 2009

TFN Exposes ‘Culture War’ Attacks in Social Studies Classrooms

The religious right’s campaign to drag Texas public schools into the culture wars is now shifting from science to social studies classrooms. And the **Texas Freedom Network** is leading the opposition to these reckless new efforts to politicize our children’s education.

In March the State Board of Education (SBOE) adopted new science curriculum standards that open the classroom door to creationist arguments against evolution. Just weeks later, TFN broke the news that far-right board members were also packing a key social studies curriculum panel with absurdly unqualified political activists. Newspapers ranging from major Texas dailies to the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Guardian* (United Kingdom) have followed with extensive reports about the attempt to hijack the public school curriculum.

In fact, the far-right activists on the so-called “expert” curriculum panel are already demanding that social studies classes teach that the Founders intended for the United States to be a distinctly Christian nation with its laws and society based on fundamentalist biblical principles. They are also calling for the removal of César Chavez, Thurgood Marshall and other historical figures whose politics they find objectionable.

These outrageous demands should come as no surprise because the panelists making them have almost no academic credentials that qualify them as genuine experts in the social sciences. They include David Barton, a former vice chairman of the Texas Republican Party and founder of WallBuilders, a Texas-based group that opposes separation of church and state. Another runs a conservative evangelical ministry, opposes separation of church and state and says God is punishing America for sexual immorality. (See page 5 for more about the social studies “experts.”)

New State Board Chair

The state Senate’s rejection of Don McLeroy, R-College Station, as SBOE chairman in May was an important step in the right direction for education in Texas. Even so, the new attacks on the social studies curriculum show that the far right is still on the offensive. The new board chair

– Gail Lowe, R-Lampasas
– appointed Barton to the social studies “expert” panel. It is clear that the board’s far-right faction is still in firm control of the SBOE’s agenda.

As a result, the battle over social studies is likely to be as heated – if not more so – than the battle over evolution and science standards. And among the likely casualties will be both the education of Texas students and the morale of Texas teachers.

In fact, far-right board members and pressure groups have already attacked the teachers and academics working on the first drafts of the new standards. Some board members even called them “radicals” who are trying to undermine patriotism and support for the free enterprise system. Teachers on the curriculum teams have been stunned by the attacks and have expressed concerns about efforts to politicize the curriculum.

The curriculum teams have already submitted initial drafts of the standards. The board and its so called “experts” will review the drafts and revisions throughout the fall. The board will have at least one public hearing, likely in January, before a final vote in March. Publishers will then use the standards to write new social studies textbooks for Texas public schools.

You can stay informed about the social studies revision on our blog, TFNinsider.org, and by subscribing to TFN Daily News Clips at www.tfn.org.



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A note from President Kathy Miller

Can change finally be coming to the State Board of Education?

That question has been on my mind a lot as I have traveled the state this year. In Dallas, San Antonio, Austin and many places in between, I'm often asked what can be done to shake the far right's stranglehold on the state board.

This really shouldn't come as a surprise. For years, we've witnessed needless battles over textbooks and curriculum standards. We've seen efforts to force sanitized and politicized reading lists into language arts classrooms and attacks on evolution in science classrooms. Board members have rejected environmental science textbooks because the books offended conservatives by addressing the increasing problems of pollution and climate change. Pushing an "abstinence-only" mantra, board members have even refused to adopt health textbooks that include a shred of medically accurate information about responsible disease and pregnancy protection.

But with eight state board seats up for election in 2010, groups of concerned citizens in various districts have taken the initiative to educate voters about the board. I've been honored to speak to those groups about the state board and the coming elections. And I've come away from each of those meetings impressed to see the enthusiasm for change.

In addition, this summer the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund sponsored a training workshop for people interested in either running for state board seats or helping candidates in state board elections. That training workshop featured prominent Republican and Democratic campaign consultants who explained how to organize, fund and run an effective election campaign. We were thrilled to see more than three dozen candidates and others from around the state pack the training room in Austin.

So to answer my question at the top: yes, it can. But that change will require countless other Texans to join their fellow citizens in getting involved and learning more about the state board and the coming elections. You can stay informed by signing up for TFN News Clips at tfn.org and by reading our ground-breaking blog, TFNinsider.org.

Get involved. The education of all our children depends on it.



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Network News is the official newsletter of the **Texas Freedom Network**.



Welcome to the TFN Board!

We welcome Joni Cohan to the Texas Freedom Network's Board of Directors! As a National Board member of the National Council of Jewish Women, she is responsible for a campaign for women's health and contraceptive access. She is also a teacher at and president-elect of the Vickery Meadow Learning Center in Dallas, which is a program to improve English literacy levels among non-English speaking adults. In her professional life, she has coordinated programs for the elderly and been a regional trainer for Head Start programs. Joni resides in Dallas and is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin.



Goodbye, Bryan!

Bryan Treat, our operations and information technology director, has left the Texas Freedom Network after three years. Bryan has kept the books, managed office operations and handled computer, software and Internet issues for our growing team during a period of rapid change here at TFN. In fact, during Bryan's tenure we have substantially upgraded our Web presence, including the launch of our blog, TFNinsider.org. The whole staff wishes Bryan the best as he heads off to the cooler breezes of the West Coast.



TFN Summer Intern: Courtney O'Dell

Courtney, who also worked as a TFN intern in summer 2008, is a graduate student getting her Master of Theological Studies degree at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. She is a graduate of Baylor University and has master's in women's studies from Texas Woman's University. Her research interests are in feminist spirituality, ecofeminism and postmodern theology.

TFN Trains Young People How to Advocate for Sex Ed

State lawmakers punted earlier this year on the chance to reform sex education policies in Texas. But now young people across the state are stepping up and joining with the **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund** to promote responsible sex education policies in public schools.

Working in partnership with Advocates for Youth, the TFN Education Fund brought together more than 30 passionate young Texans (ages 14-24) to a Youth Summer Summit held in Austin June 12-13. These young activists brought back to their communities new skills that will help them organize their peers and advocate for responsible sex education in local schools. Some of them will also volunteer to serve on local School Health Advisory Councils, which recommend health education policies to school boards and administrators.

The summit featured presentations from TFNEF President Kathy Miller as well as education and public health specialists, including Marissa Rathbone of the Texas Education Agency, Susan Tortolero of the University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health, consultant Ellen Fowlkes of Austin, and Meredith Schonfeld-Hicks of Advocates for Youth.

Members of TFNEF's Youth Leadership Council were among the summit participants. These emerging leaders will have the opportunity to build and refine their skills by attending Advocates for Youth's training in Washington, D.C., in September.



Top: More than 30 young Texans learned how to promote responsible sex education at a TFN Education Fund Youth Summit in Austin this summer.

Bottom: Youth Summit participants Garrett Mize of Dallas and Aaliyah Noble-Alexander of Austin share ideas with others at the conference.

CANDIDATE TRAINING DRAWS PACKED HOUSE

The **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund's** first-ever State Board of Education Candidate Training drew more than three dozen people to Austin in July. This nonpartisan workshop educated potential candidates and others interested in SBOE elections on how to put together an effective campaign.

Experienced political consultants from both major political parties provided an overview of what a successful campaign for the state board will require. Participants got practical, hands-on information on preparing a comprehensive campaign plan, communicating an effective message, raising money and targeting voters.

We're grateful to consultants Robert Jones of Annie's List, Matt Matthews of Matt Matthews and Company, James Aldrete of Message Audience and Presentation, and fund-raising guru Rebecca Leal of RYLO Consulting for so generously sharing their expertise at the workshop.

Eight of the SBOE's 15 seats will be up for election in 2010.



Left: TFNEF President Kathy Miller provides an overview of the State Board of Education and the upcoming elections. Middle: Consultant Rebecca Leal of Austin walked potential SBOE candidates through the important steps of campaign fund-raising. Right: Participants learn about the importance of effective messaging for political campaigns with James Aldrete.

The 81st Legislature in Review

TFN Puts the Religious Right on the Defensive

Despite setbacks nationally in the 2008 elections, the religious right remained a powerful force in 2009 session of the Texas Legislature. Even so, the religious right failed to win passage for much of its legislative agenda during the regular session. Moreover, the Texas Freedom Network pushed an aggressive agenda calling for reform of the State Board of Education and sex education and defending strong neighborhood schools, science education and scientific and medical research. Our efforts put far-right groups in Texas on the defensive on a number of fronts.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Constant and bitterly divisive “culture war” battles on the State Board of Education (SBOE) over issues like evolution, global warming and religion in public schools caught the attention of legislators. TFN’s political team and countless letters, e-mails and phone calls from activists around the state called on lawmakers to change how the state decides what nearly 5 million Texas children learn in their classrooms. One of the most important victories came in the last week of the session, when the Senate rejected the nomination of creationist Don McLeroy as chairman of the SBOE. Lawmakers also required video Web casts that make it easier for voters to monitor the SBOE’s meetings. Unfortunately, legislative leaders—especially in the Senate—blocked bipartisan legislation that would have removed or diminished the SBOE’s authority over approving curriculum standards and adopting textbooks.

SCIENCE EDUCATION

TFN helped kill two particularly dangerous bills that would have threatened sound science education in Texas classrooms. One bill would have required students to learn phony “weaknesses” of evolution in science classes. Another would have permitted a Dallas-based evangelical organization to get around state regulations and offer master’s of science education degrees in creationism.

SCIENCE & MEDICAL RESEARCH

TFN worked with coalition partners to defeat an attempt by far-right lawmakers to ban public funding for promising medical research involving embryonic stem cells. If passed, the ban would have threatened even privately funded embryonic stem cell research at publicly funded facilities.

VOUCHERS

Following up on important progress in 2007, TFN and its coalition partners continued to solidify opposition to private school vouchers. This year the House voted overwhelmingly to forbid the use of public funding for tuition at private and religious schools. Unlike in 2007, however, this key protection for neighborhood public schools made it into the final state budget. That result ensures Texas will have no publicly funded private school voucher program for at least two more years.

SEX EDUCATION

A TFN Education Fund report in February revealed that more than 96 percent of school districts in Texas—which has the nation’s third-highest rate of teen births—teach abstinence-only when it comes to sex education. Early in the legislative session, however, many lawmakers appeared ready to require that students learn medically accurate information about responsible pregnancy and disease prevention in addition to the importance of abstinence. But far-right pressure groups employed familiar scare tactics, warning that such legislation would amount to “censorship” and lead to students learning about “gay and recreational sex.” As a result, key reform bills failed to pass. But TFN succeeded in getting lawmakers to require that school districts inform parents about whether they provide comprehensive, medically accurate sex education for students—instruction that polls show a strong majority of Texans support.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

TFN helped ensure that legislation that might lead to funding for faith-based groups providing social services included important oversight standards and safeguards against religious discrimination.

TFN Monitors the SBOE: Meet the Social Studies ‘Experts’

Members of the State Board of Education’s far-right faction could barely hide their contempt for science and education experts during the debate over teaching evolution in Texas public schools. Even Don McLeroy, the board’s chair at the time, couldn’t restrain himself, shouting during one meeting, “Somebody’s got to stand up to these experts!”

So the makeup of the state board’s panel of so-called “experts” for the revision of social studies curriculum standards should come as no surprise. The six-member panel includes three mainstream academics from Texas universities. But it also features three ideologues clearly put on the panel primarily because they share the same extreme political views as the state board’s far-right members. Even worse, two of those ideologues lack any relevant academic or teaching experience in the social sciences that would justify the label “expert.”

MAINSTREAM ACADEMICS



Jim Kracht is a geography and education professor at Texas A&M University. He holds a master’s in geography and a doctorate in social studies education. He currently serves as

associate dean for academic affairs in the university’s College of Education and is a senior fellow for the Gilbert Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education (Texas State University).



Francisco de la Teja is a professor and chairman of the history department at Texas State University-San Marcos. De la Teja has a master’s in Latin American history and a doctorate in colonial Latin

American history. He served a two-year term as Texas State Historian until May of this year. The distinguished professor has authored three books, has edited seven, and has written chapters for nine others. He has also written 11 journal articles, nine articles for encyclopedias and other reference resources, and scores

of reviews, scripts and translations in other publications. His list of lectures, awards and professional associations is similarly lengthy.



Lybeth Hodges is a professor of history and government at Texas Woman’s University, where she teaches in an honors scholars program and the College of Professional Education. Hodges has a

master’s in history from TWU and a doctorate in history from Texas Tech University.

IDEOLOGUES



Daniel Dreisbach actually brings some academic credentials to the panel, although his work and interests are very narrowly focused. Dreisbach is a professor in the School of Public Affairs at American

University in Washington, D.C., and has earned a law degree and a doctorate of philosophy in politics. He also serves on the faculty of the James Madison Fellowship Foundation in Washington. Dreisbach has authored seven books and written 16 chapters in other books, seven reference articles, and nearly two dozen reviews. His work and interests appear to be almost entirely focused on the role of religion in American history, society and law. A darling of the religious right, Dreisbach also argues that

the Constitution does not protect separation of church and state.



David Barton founded and heads WallBuilders, a Texas-based organization that calls separation of church and state a myth and argues that the nation’s laws and society should be based on

fundamentalist Christian biblical principles. Barton’s only earned degree is a bachelor’s in religious education. He claims authorship of 14 books, but all were self-published by his WallBuilder Press. A former vice chairman of the Texas Republican Party, Barton argues that students should learn that the nation’s political system is based on “republican,” not “democratic,” values.



The **Rev. Peter Marshall** runs the Massachusetts-based Peter Marshall Ministries, which seeks “to restore America to its Bible-based foundations through preaching, teaching, and writing on America’s

Christian heritage and on Christian discipleship and revival.” Marshall has a bachelor’s degree in history and a master’s of divinity degree. He has co-authored three books ostensibly on American history — all three from Christian book publisher Revell and marketed as part of an “America’s Christian Heritage Package” on his Web site. Like Barton, Marshall opposes separation of church and state. He also says that Hurricane Katrina and America’s defeat in the Vietnam War were God’s punishment for sexual immorality, including homosexuality, in the United States.

What’s Ahead

It didn’t take long for Barton and Marshall to begin to inject their conservative religious politics into the social studies curriculum. The two have already called for the removal of historical figures like César Chávez and Thurgood Marshall from history textbooks, characterizing them as too unimportant or poor role models for students. They are also demanding that the state board require that students learn that the Founders intended to create a distinctly Christian nation based on biblical principles.

Barton, Marshall and the other panelists will review initial drafts of the new standards submitted later this summer by writing teams made up of teachers, academics and others. Final drafts are not expected until late fall. The state board will hold at least one public hearing before a scheduled final vote on the standards in March 2010. Publishers will use the standards to write new history, geography and other social studies textbooks up for adoption in Texas. Publishers often sell those same textbooks to schools in smaller states across the country.

From the Front Lines...
TO THE HEADLINES

TFN: MAKING NEWS & PROGRESS ACROSS TEXAS

TFN Announces San Antonio and Houston Receptions

Texas Freedom Network is celebrating the mainstream values we hold so dear!
Join the Board of Directors and staff for our 14th Annual Members' Reception in a town near you.

San Antonio, Texas

Tuesday, September 22, 2009
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Reception at the home of Nicole Foy

Houston, Texas

Thursday, November 12, 2009
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Reception at the home of Nancy & Neal Manne

Sponsorship and ticket information available at www.tfn.org.

A GIFT HAS BEEN GIVEN

In Honor of:

Hon. Valinda Bolton
by Rhonda Gerson

Grace Ann Durr
by Mary C. Cullinane

Mr. WM Didycz
by John Zaccaria

Rhonda & Paul Gerson
by Lucinda Jane Merrill

Audrey Kaplan
by Jean Donald Wilson

Kelly Lowenberg
by Julie Lowenberg

Miss Mackenzie Ostfeld
by Linda Frank

Care About Sex Education in Your Community?

Here Is Your Chance to Do Something About It

Did you know?

Texas law gives each school district a great deal of “local control” in its approach to sex education. Unfortunately, the **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund’s** recent study revealed that more than 96 percent of Texas districts utilize a strict abstinence-only approach to sex education. This is wildly out of step with public opinion in Texas, where polls show an overwhelming majority of parents prefer that schools emphasize abstinence while also giving teens medically accurate information about condoms and other methods of responsible pregnancy and disease prevention.

Did you know?

Every school district provides a way for you to influence decisions about sex education. According to Texas law, every school district is required to receive a recommendation about sex education policy from a local School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) made up of educators and other community members. But our research also shows that most districts don’t have a well-functioning SHAC that pays attention to these issues.

TFN is looking for individuals who are willing to join a local SHAC and work for responsible sex education in their schools. Don’t worry if you have not kept current on sex education policy or if you have never participated in your school district before. TFN staff members are prepared to help you every step of the way.

If you are interested in advocating for responsible sex education in your community, the first step to positive change is simply e-mailing or calling TFN. Contact Onnalita Mannicia at 512-322-0545 or onnalita@tfn.org.

TFN Announces Distinguished Lineup for 2009 'Speaker Series'



SAN ANTONIO
Cecile Richards

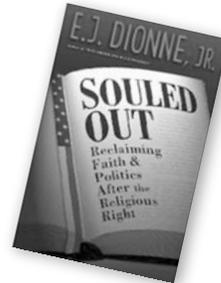
TFN founder and current President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Monday, September 14 | 6:30 p.m.
Temple Beth-El

AUSTIN
E. J. Dionne

*Washington Post columnist and author of
Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics
After the Religious Right*

Thursday, September 24 | 6:30 p.m.
First Baptist Church



DALLAS
Dr. Charles Haynes

Senior Scholar at Freedom Forum First Amendment Center

Thursday, November 5 | 6:30 p.m.
Northaven United Methodist Church

Don't miss your chance to hear these influential speakers address some of the most critical political issues facing Texas today. All of these events are free and open to the public.

Register today at www.tfn.org or by calling 512-322-0545.

SUPPORT THE SPEAKER SERIES

The 2009 Faith & Freedom Speaker Series is made possible through the generosity of supporters like you. We are committed to keeping the Speaker Series free and open to the public. But we need your help today!

Support the 2009 Faith & Freedom Speaker Series by signing up as a sponsor today. With your tax-deductible contribution, you will help the TFN Education Fund provide this important forum for the discussion of critical issues at the intersection of culture, religion and politics in Texas.

Go to www.tfn.org to make your gift.





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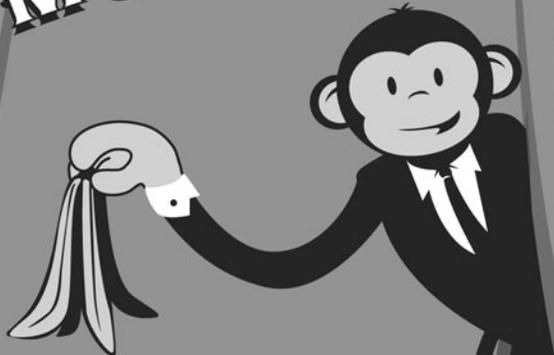
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TEXAS FREEDOM NETWORK'S
**14TH ANNUAL
CELEBRATION**

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2009

★ AUSTIN MUSIC HALL ★

7:00 ~ 10:00 P.M.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, TO PURCHASE SPONSORSHIPS OR INDIVIDUAL TICKETS, OR TO DONATE AN ITEM TO THE SILENT AUCTION:
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