

Here We Go Again: Evolution Under Attack

When it comes to science education in Texas, it has been hard to ignore the headlines lately.

*'Governor Appoints Creationist as Education Board Chair'
'Texas Science Director Forced Out Over Evolution'
'Creationist School Applies to Offer Science Degrees in Texas'*

More than 80 years since the Scopes "Monkey" trial, this country just can't seem to get past battles over religion and science. What's more, all of these recent stories are only prelude to a much bigger fight over science education set to begin in Texas in 2008.

Targeting Evolution

For decades, the religious right has opposed teaching about evolution in public schools and has called for teaching Bible-based creationism instead. The Texas Freedom Network has been preparing for the religious right's renewed attack on evolution this year. Over the coming months, the State Board of Education will rewrite the state's science curriculum standards. Those standards determine what more than 4.5 million public school students learn in our public schools.

The science standards revision comes after two decades of efforts by the religious right to take control of the state board. After the 2006 elections, that faction grew to seven members on the 15-seat board. An eighth member, Geraldine "Tincy" Miller, R-Dallas, has often sided with the religious right on issues such as abstinence-only sex education. Moreover, last year Gov. Rick Perry appointed a creationist – Don McLeroy, R-Bryan – as the board's chair.

That the heavily politicized board might now be under the firm control of the religious right has set off alarm bells across the state. Even worse is the growing possibility that politics has also infected other state agencies. That became clear last fall, when the Texas Education Agency forced its science director – Christine Comer – to resign after she forwarded an e-mail about a speech by a pro-evolution scientist. TEA absurdly claimed that the science director must remain neutral on whether students should learn about evolution or creationism in their science classes. Shortly afterward, a state advisory committee recommended that the commissioner of

higher education allow the Institute for Creation Research in Dallas to grant master's degrees in science education.

TFN has responded by calling its Stand Up for Science Rapid Response Team into action and alerting mainstream news media across the country. Supporters of sound science have flooded newspapers with letters and state education offices with phone calls and e-mails. Newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Austin American-Statesman*, the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Dallas Morning News* have focused public attention on the controversy. Editorials have called on Texas officials to ensure that political and religious agendas don't interfere with a sound science education in the state's classrooms.

The Battle Ahead

Yet these are only the opening skirmishes in what will be a long fight over science education in Texas. TFN is already building a broad Stand Up for Science coalition of state and national groups. That coalition is unified by the same message: Texas students can't succeed in college and the jobs of the future with a 19th-century science education. Public schools should be making sure students get a 21st-century education, not deciding which religious beliefs to teach in science classes.

You can help promote sound science in our state's public schools! **This newsletter includes a special Stand Up for Science Activist Toolkit after page 4.** That pull-out guide includes important information about the revision of science curriculum standards. In addition, you can join the campaign by filling out the sign-up form or visiting www.tfn.org.

Stand up for the future of Texas by Standing Up for Science in our state's public schools!



SPECIAL PULL-OUT INSIDE!
STAND UP FOR SCIENCE
ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

A note from President Kathy Miller

Two years ago, the **Texas Freedom Network** took a significant step toward strengthening progressive voices in Texas politics. Under tax laws, nonprofits like TFN may provide election endorsements only to members who have paid their annual dues and have affirmed their membership. For the first time ever, TFN did so in 2006, passing on our endorsements in races for governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education and Congress to our members.



TFN can expand our role in promoting mainstream values in Texas by expanding the number of members to whom we send our endorsements in the 2008 election cycle. We believe it is critical that our members – whether they are Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Greens or political independents – know the positions candidates for the Legislature and the State Board of Education take on TFN’s core values: supporting civil liberties, religious freedom and strong public schools.

The effects of misplaced priorities by far-right elected officials are plain to see. Last year alone, far-right extremists tried to mandate public school Bible classes that would have promoted one religious perspective over all others. They also renewed their dangerous opposition to providing age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education that Texas teens need to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Just as disturbing, this year the State Board of Education – which is dominated by a powerful faction of far-right members – is revising the science curriculum for Texas public schools. We expect to see a full-scale assault on sound science education, particularly against instruction on evolution, in our children’s classrooms.

If we are to continue to be successful in defending the critical mainstream values that are under attack in Texas today, we need elected leaders committed to them. As a TFN member, you can help.

I’m asking you to personally and directly help combat the dangerous extremism of the religious right by simply returning the envelope enclosed in this newsletter with your annual membership dues of at least \$35 and a check mark affirming your membership.

By affirming your membership, TFN will share with you:

- voting records of public officials,
- TFN legislative and State Board of Education endorsements, and
- up-to-date, inside political information.

The most successful organizations are those that operate on all fronts. TFN has been very successful in lobbying the state Legislature and challenging the actions of the religious right. To achieve similar results in electoral politics in Texas, we need members like you!

Thank you for your continued support of TFN!



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Dr. John “Jack” Steel,
grandfather of Ryan Valentine
by Chris Adams & Gary Lazaron

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



TFN Welcomes New Board Member Susan Smith

Susan Smith is a long-time advocate for progressive causes and supporter of the **Texas Freedom Network**. Now retired, Susan taught U.S. history in the public school system for 26 years. Currently, Susan is a member of the Masters Leadership Program and has been involved with San Antonio’s YWCA and the Juvenile Detention Center. Susan and husband Tommy Smith have three sons and eight grandchildren. Welcome, Susan!

TFN Uncovers Secretive Pro-Perry Group

The **Texas Freedom Network** is asking the Internal Revenue Service to investigate whether a Houston-based nonprofit foundation and its backers improperly sought to drag churches into Gov. Rick Perry's re-election campaign in 2006.



TFN researchers have uncovered tax records showing that a Houston-based nonprofit called the Niemoller Foundation, created in May 2005, spent about \$1.26 million in 2005 to fund the activities of the Texas Restoration Project. The secretive Restoration Project sponsored a series of "Pastors' Policy Briefings" – all of which were invitation-only events closed to the press – in 2005. Gov. Perry was the only candidate for governor in 2006 to speak at those events. The Texas Restoration Project then hosted another pastors' event in January 2007 to celebrate the governor's inauguration for another term.



TFN Speaker Series Draws Crowd in San Antonio

More than 200 people came to Temple Beth El in San Antonio to hear Rev. Barry Lynn speak at TFN's final "Faith & Freedom Speaker Series" event in 2007. The crowd was so charmed by Lynn's presentation that many stood in line afterward to have him sign a copy of his new book *Piety & Politics*.

The 2005 "briefings" – all funded secretly by the Niemoller Foundation – now appear to have masked a sophisticated and expensive effort to turn houses of worship into parts of the governor's re-election campaign machine. In fact, TFN's research reveals that the Niemoller Foundation's primary contributors were major long-time donors to Rick Perry's political campaigns: San Antonio businessman Jim Leinger, Houston homebuilder Bob Perry, and East Texas chicken tycoon Bo Pilgrim.

Under the law, tax-exempt nonprofits like the Niemoller Foundation must not participate or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Even so, organizations similar to the Texas Restoration Project have set up shop in other states. The South Carolina Renewal Project and Iowa Renewal Project, for example, have hosted speeches by Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.

In 2006, TFN joined with clergy to call on congregations to resist efforts to drag their houses of worship into partisan political campaigns. You can learn more about the Respect Our Faith campaign at www.respectourfaith.org. To read more about TFN's research into the Texas Restoration Project, visit www.tfn.org/religiousright/irstxrestorationproject/.

STAND UP FOR SCIENCE CLERGY PETITION

The **Texas Faith Network** is supporting the Stand Up for Science campaign with a special clergy petition. Clergy can fax the signed petition statement below to 512-322-0550; mail it to P.O. Box 1624, Austin, TX 78767; or sign on at www.tfn.org.

We believe religious convictions about the origin of life are sacred and should be cultivated and strengthened in homes and houses of worship.

We further believe that efforts to insert religious beliefs into science classrooms misunderstand and demean both faith and science.

We call on the Texas State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education to adopt science curriculum standards that:

- are based on sound, peer-reviewed scholarship;
- do not undermine instruction on evolution, a concept that is critical to the understanding of all of the biological sciences; and
- leave instruction about religious beliefs to our families and congregations.

Name: _____

Congregational/Denominational Affiliation: _____

TFN Moves to Counter SBOE Power Grab

In November, the Texas State Board of Education voted to reject a proposed mathematics textbook for third graders. Normally, such a vote would not be news, but to those familiar with the history of textbook censorship on the board, this move sets an ominous precedent.

Alarming, the seven-member bloc of religious conservatives who voted to reject the textbook refused to give reasons for doing so. Led by Cynthia Dunbar, R-Richmond, and Terri Leo, R-Spring, far-right members claimed that the board is not required to say why it rejects any textbook. Yet under a law passed by the Legislature in 1995, Senate Bill 1, the state board may reject a textbook only if it fails to cover the state's curriculum standards, has factual errors, or fails to meet manufacturing requirements. Then in January, the far-right bloc refused to allow the minority side on the math textbook issue even to include its objections in the board's minutes. Still



Far-right SBOE members Cynthia Dunbar and Terri Leo

more troubling is that board member Rick Agosto, D-San Antonio, voted with the far-right faction on both the rejection of the math textbook and efforts to silence the opposition to that vote.

The issue at stake is much bigger than the rejection of a single mathematics textbook. (TFN took no position on the merits of the textbook itself.) TFN maintains that if the state board does

not have to give a reason for rejecting a textbook, then the 1995 anti-censorship law is toothless. And if that's the case, then the content of our schoolchildren's textbooks will be based on the personal and political beliefs of whatever majority controls the state board – precisely what the Legislature acted to prevent in 1995.

TFN has requested that the state attorney general act to stop this end run around the Legislature's clear intent to bar the state board from censoring textbooks. If the board's far-right members get away with ignoring the law, then it's open season again on textbooks that teach about evolution and other topics on which a majority of board members may have personal and political objections.

State Board of Education Elections

Seven seats are up for election on the State Board of Education in 2008. Following are candidates who have filed for those seats.

I = Incumbent

District 2

Mary Helen Berlanga (I), Democrat-Corpus Christi
Lupe A. Gonzalez, Democrat-Mission
Peter H. Johnston, Republican-East Bernard

District 6

Mary Ann Bryan, Libertarian-Houston
Brian Kuzma, Libertarian-Houston
Terri Leo (I), Republican-Spring

District 7

David Bradley (I), Republican-Beaumont
Laura Ewing, Democrat-Friendswood
Richard R. Johnson, Libertarian-Galveston

District 8

Barbara Cargill (I), Republican-The Woodlands
Kim B. Stroman, Libertarian-Longview

District 11

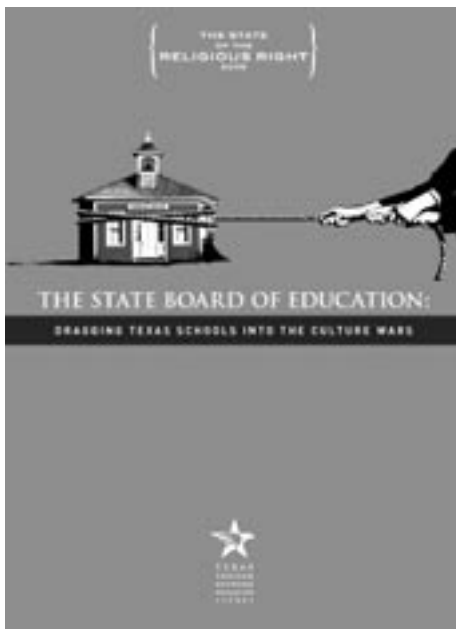
Bruce Beckman, Libertarian-Haslet
Patricia "Pat" Hardy (I), Republican-Fort Worth
Barney Maddox, Republican-Cleburne

District 13

Mavis Best Knight (I), Democrat-Dallas
Cindy Werner, Republican-Duncanville

District 14

Edra Bogle, Democrat-Denton
Gail Lowe (I), Republican-Lampasas
John E. Shuey, Libertarian-Carrollton



STATE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT: 2008

The State Board of Education: Dragging Texas Schools into the Culture Wars

The transformation of the State Board of Education into a battleground in the nation's culture wars is the topic of the **Texas Freedom Network Education Fund's** third annual report on the religious right in Texas. This year's report explores how the religious right has worked for nearly two decades to capture control of the state board, which decides what Texas children will learn in public schools. Read about board members on the far right who use their positions to undermine the teaching of evolution in science classes, censor medically accurate information on responsible pregnancy and disease prevention, attack the rights of gay and lesbian families, and tear down the wall separating church and state.

The 2008 report also includes an updated catalog of far-right groups based in Texas. The catalog offers information on the finances, leadership and agendas of more than a dozen far-right groups. You will also find information recently uncovered by **TFN** on the funding of the Texas Restoration Project, which worked to drag houses of worship into Gov. Rick Perry's re-election campaign in 2005 and 2006.

The report is available at www.tfn.org.

San Antonio Members' Reception a Huge Success!

An enthusiastic crowd of long-time San Antonio supporters and new members joined **Texas Freedom Network** staff and board members in November to celebrate real Texas values. Susan and Tommy Smith and Ann and Jim McMullan generously hosted the members' reception. More than 100 supporters gathered to toast TFN's many accomplishments and to look ahead to a promising 2008. We are deeply grateful to the Smiths and McMullans for their continued generosity. And "thank you" to all our San Antonio-area supporters!



Susan & Tommy Smith, TFN President Kathy Miller, Jim & Ann McMullan



Stu Schlossberg, Roger Bowler, J. Cary Barton and Darcie Bowler



Ellie & Chuck Duval with Laura Narvaez



Mary Fisher, Sharon Shen, Julie Parker and Linda Perez

TFN Celebrates in Fort Worth

Meralen and Gerry Tyson hosted the **Texas Freedom Network's** second annual members' reception in Fort Worth on December 3. Supporters enjoyed fantastic conversation, gracious hospitality and incredible food from "Iron Chef America" champion Chef Tim Love. "Thank you" to the Tysons and all our Fort Worth-area supporters.



TFN President Kathy Miller, Meralen & Gerry Tyson and TFN Political Director Jo-Hannah Whitsett



Terri & Luke Ellis with Karen Anisman

Thanks to All TFN Supporters in 2007!

The **Texas Freedom Network's** major donors provide the resources and commitment that are critical to fighting the religious right. We offer heartfelt thanks to the TFN Freedom Council – donors who contribute an annual gift of \$1,000 or more – for their generosity in making 2007 a tremendous financial success.

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Freedom Fighters make monthly gifts that help sustain the work of TFN. Thank you to these loyal contributors!

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Volunteers are an invaluable part of the TFN activist team. They stuff thousands of envelopes, staff our phone-banking efforts, contact elected officials and help ensure that our special events run smoothly. Many thanks to all of the volunteers who helped TFN make a difference in 2007!

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TFNEF Is Hiring Summer Interns

Are you a graduate or undergraduate student who wants to help promote mainstream values in Texas? **The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund** will soon be accepting applications for its summer 2008 internship program. Keep an eye on www.tfn.org for more information.



TFN Volunteer Appreciation Party

Help us recognize the best volunteers in Texas!

Thursday, Feb. 28, 2008

5:30-7:30 p.m.

TFN Offices in Austin