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Authors Say: “Don’t Mess with Textbooks!”

Changes proposed by antievolutionists would mislead students

Austin TX and Oakland CA, September 8, 2003 — “Evolution is a normal part of science and should be treated the same way as all other scientific ideas.” That was the message to Texas authorities from the authors of leading biology textbooks, delivered today in a statement jointly released by Texas Citizens for Science and the National Center for Science Education. The authors, who are scientists and educators, also stated, “It is a disservice to students to mislead them about the important position that evolution holds in biological and other sciences.”

The Texas State Board of Education (SBoE) meets on Wednesday, September 10, in Austin for a second hearing on biology textbooks submitted for state adoption. As usual, the inclusion of evolution in the textbooks has elicited attacks from antievolutionists. The SBoE has been pressured by creationists to require publishers to “correct” supposed “errors” in the books – but the only errors of concern to them involve the topic of evolution!

Because of court decisions in the 1980s and 1990s striking down the advocacy of creation science in public schools, creationists have changed tactics. Instead of proposing that evolution be “balanced” by the teaching of creation science and other “scientific alternatives to evolution” they are now proposing that evolution be “balanced” by the teaching of “weaknesses of evolution.” The result is that science education and science literacy suffers.

“Making the ‘corrections’ of the textbooks recommended by the antievolutionists would result in the production of substandard textbooks and substandard science education for Texas students,” said NCSE Executive Director Dr. Eugenie C. Scott. “If publishers are required to make these changes, the Texas editions of these textbooks will be inferior to textbooks sold elsewhere, which will put Texas students at a disadvantage. Is this what the Texas SBoE wants?”

Texas Citizens for Science President Dr. Steven Schafersman added, “The ‘corrections’ that creationists want inserted into the books are scientifically invalid, according to evolutionary biologists who are familiar with the science. We want our Texas students to learn the scientific consensus, which is that evolution occurred, though details are debated. We don’t want them taught creationist distortions of science.”

The biology textbook authors agree, explaining that the “coverage of evolution in biology textbooks we have written reflects the broad consensus in the scientific community. ...We deplore the efforts made in some states and districts to require that evolution be disclaimed. Such disclaimers single out evolution from all other scientific ideas as somehow less reliable or less accepted by scientists. Evolution is a normal part of science and should be treated the same way as all other scientific ideas. It does a disservice to students to mislead them about the important position that evolution holds in biological and other sciences.”

The Statement on Evolution in Textbooks, signed by virtually all of the authors of books under consideration in Texas in 2003, is available on-line at <http://www.txscience.org/files/statements.htm> and also at http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/3213_statements_from_educational_or_8_8_2003.asp#abt.

The National Center for Science Education is a nonprofit organization, based in Oakland, California, dedicated to defending the teaching of evolution in the public schools. On the web at <http://www.ncseweb.org>. Texas Citizens for Science is a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to maintaining the professionalism of science education in Texas public schools and the integrity of science in Texas schools, textbooks, and curricula. On the web at <http://www.txscience.org>.

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