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Battle on Teaching Evolution Sharpens - posted by Compton (), on: 2005/3/14 19:53

By Peter Slevin

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WICHITA — Propelled by a polished strategy crafted by activists on America's political right, a battle is intensifying across the nation over how students are taught about the origins of life. Policymakers in 19 states are weighing proposals that question the science of evolution.

The growing trend has alarmed scientists and educators who consider it a masked effort to replace science with theology. But 80 years after the Scopes "monkey" trial -- in which a Tennessee man was prosecuted for violating state law by teaching evolution -- it is the anti-evolutionary scientists and Christian activists who say they are the ones being persecuted, by a liberal establishment.

In Seattle, the nonprofit Discovery Institute spends more than \$1 million a year for research, polls and media pieces supporting intelligent design. In Fort Lauderdale, Christian evangelist James Kennedy established a Creation Studies Institute. In Virginia, Liberty University is sponsoring the Creation Mega Conference with a Kentucky group called Answers in Genesis, which raised \$9 million in 2003.

At the state and local level, from South Carolina to California, these advocates are using lawsuits and school board debates to counter evolutionary theory. Alabama and Georgia legislators recently introduced bills to allow teachers to challenge evolutionary theory in the classroom. Ohio, Minnesota, New Mexico and Ohio have approved new rules allowing that. And a school board member in a Tennessee county wants stickers pasted on textbooks that say evolution remains unproven.

Not Science, Politics

"The movement is a veneer over a certain

"As the Christian right has success on a variety of issues, it emboldens them to expand their agenda," Hankins said. "When they have losses . . . it gives them fuel for their fire."

The efforts are not limited to schools. From offices overlooking Puget Sound, Meyer is waging a careful campaign to change the way Americans think about the natural world. The Discovery Institute devotes about 85 percent of its budget to funding scientists, with other money going to public action campaigns.

The 2001 conference presented its Wedge of Truth award to members of the 1999 Kansas Board of Education that played down evolution and allowed local boards to decide what students would learn. A board elected in 2001 overturned that decision, but a fresh batch of conservatives won office in November, when Bush swamped his Democratic opponent, Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), here by 62 to 37 percent.

"The thing that excites me is we really are in a revolution of scientific thought," Calvert said. He described offering advice in such places as Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio and Cobb County, Ga., where a federal court recently halted an attempt to affix a sticker to science textbooks saying evolution is theory, not fact.

'Liberalism Will Die'

"If students only have one thing to consider, one option, that's really more brainwashing," said Duckett, who sent her children to Christian schools because of her frustration. Students should be exposed to the Big Bang, evolution, intelligent design "and, beyond that, any other belief that a kid in class has. It should all be okay."

To fundamentalist Christians, Fox said, the fight to teach God's role in creation is becoming the essential front in America's culture war. The issue is on the agenda at every meeting of pastors he attends. If evolution's boosters can be forced to back down, he said, the Christian right's agenda will advance.

"If you believe God created that baby, it makes it a whole lot harder to get rid of that baby," Fox said. "If you can cause enough doubt on evolution, liberalism will die."

"Creationism's going to be our big battle. We're hoping that Kansas will be the model, and we're in it for the long haul," Fox said. He added that it does not matter "who gets the credit, as long as we win."

Re: Battle on Teaching Evolution Sharpens - posted by Angyl, on: 2005/3/15 14:25

Quote:

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Agreed this is a very exciting aspect of the whole thing. More and more I see the general public, which swallowed evolution hook-line-and sinker in the 60s, coming out of a dream, as it were and saying "huh?" to evolution.