

The Ohio Academy of Science

1500 West Third Avenue Suite 228 Columbus OH 43212-2817

Phone 614/488-2228 Outside of Area Code 614, 1-800-OHIOSCI Fax 614/488-7629

Email oas@iwaynet.net Website <http://www.ohiosci.org>

Fostering curiosity, discovery and innovation to benefit society.

February 23, 2004

The Hon. Bob Taft
Governor
State of Ohio
30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6117

SUBJECT: Pending Vote on Science Lesson by State Board of Education

Dear Governor Taft:

We are writing on behalf of The Ohio Academy of Science, the organization we have been elected by our colleagues to represent. Our primary concern is that the science education of Ohio's students should not be compromised by political or social agendas unrelated to learning contemporary science. We ask for your unwavering support toward this goal.

In this letter we aim (1) to explain to you the significance of what will happen if the State Board of Education approves a defective model science lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") at its March 2004 meeting, and (2) to ask that you implore your appointees on the State Board not to approve this lesson. The enclosure outlines reasons why the lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") is defective both scientifically and pedagogically. Basically the lesson fails to meet the Board's own standards for what constitutes science, the definition of which the Board derived, verbatim, from the Academy's definition. Thus, having defined science for the State Board of Education, we conclude that the model science lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") is defective because it is not science and has no place in the science curriculum.

When you last spoke with the Academy's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Lynn E. Elfner, you assured him that we had nothing to worry about because of your good appointees on the Ohio Board of Education. A representative in the employ of one of the State School Board members who has voted for the lesson in question also contacted Mr. Elfner behind the scenes. The party stated his interest in political unity inasmuch as we all need to work together on other matters beyond education. That anonymous representative explored with Mr. Elfner the possibility of compromise. Mr. Elfner explained that the nature of science demands that fully qualified peers derive consensus on scientific matters and that compromise, in the typical political sense, is not within the realm of science, especially when compromise would result in the issues of creationism or Intelligent Design creeping into either State Science Education Standards or models lessons.

Now we find ourselves in a dilemma that perhaps only you can resolve.

Significance

Damaging Ohio's Image for the Third Frontier

First, the significance of what will happen if the State Board of Education approves a defective model science lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") at its March 2004 meeting is that it will damage efforts of your Third Frontier Program to attract and retain high level researchers in Ohio. Any serious scientist who may grow up in Ohio or who may be recruited from the outside wants an intellectual environment with integrity and not political compromise. Ohio will not be competitive if scientists—upon whom your Third Frontier program depends—have to worry about the quality of education of their children and future employees. Already Ohio's scientific and educational image suffers nationally because the State Board of Education ignored a letter from Dr. Bruce Alberts, President of The National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

When the State Development Department recently had a conflict of interest problem with a Third Frontier grant it wisely turned to the NAS for help. How can The State of Ohio Development Department rely upon the NAS while the State Board of Education ignores the advice of NAS—with the imprimatur from Congress as the Nation's scientific advisor—and treats Dr. Alberts as just another scientist?

The details of the above are reported in an Associated Press news article in the Washington Post that also appeared in many Ohio papers and in several editorials. The fact that State School Board member James Turner commented that the scientists at the Board meetings sounded to him like a couple of teenagers fussing in the back seat of a car did not help Ohio's image. In short, we are embarrassed for his statement and for the complicity of other members of the State Board of Education who did not challenge Mr. Turner's remarks.

Advancing the Wedge of Intelligent Design

Second, approval of a defective model science lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") will advance the "wedge" strategy of the Intelligent Design movement whose purpose is to inject fundamentalist Christian beliefs into education. This will be the "Ohio Model" to be touted in all other states. "If we can do it in Ohio we can do it anywhere" will be their motto. Or, in the typical political sense, "As Ohio goes, so goes the Nation."

Connecting the dots to religious politics

Third, given the contents of the current lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution"), and the history of how it was written, we have sufficient dots to connect to draw a straight line between the authors of the lesson and avowed advocates of Intelligent Design and fundamentalist Christian organizations. Adoption of this lesson will interject religion—indeed specific religious beliefs not universally shared by other religions—into Ohio's science classrooms. For example, the enclosed transcript of public remarks by Mr. Robert Lattimer, the head of Ohio's Intelligent Design movement, documents the three Intelligent Design advocates that were appointed to the writing team with the blessings, or perhaps advocacy, of the Co-Chairs of the Board's Standards Committee, Mr. Michael Cochran and Mr. Jim Craig.

Opaque Public Process

Fourth, adoption of this lesson will validate, if not encourage, a process that has not been transparent in spite of claims to the contrary from Board member Mr. Michael Cochran. It took the Academy five weeks and \$140 under a public records law request to secure the initial documents. In abrupt contrast to the excellent external review process used to develop Ohio's exemplary Science Standards, the process for making the model lesson essentially was closed to the scientific community. Of the 55 members on the advisory group and writing team, the Ohio Department of Education selected only three scientists; the Department knew that two of these were creationists. Finally, there have been no outside focus groups and no attempt made to contract with independent, outside expert scientific reviewers as was done with the Science Standards.

Uninspiring Science Education

Fifth, when Mr. W. G. Jurgensen, the CEO of Nationwide Insurance, launched your Commission on Teaching Success, he commented on the significance of the underlying concept of the popular business book entitled Good to Great. Listening to comments of several staff and State School board members it's obvious why education is crisis in Ohio: the paradigm of some board members is not "good to great", rather it is "not very good is good enough." That paradigm will not make Ohio competitive world wide. The lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") is not even good, let alone "good enough."

Constitutionality Issue

Sixth, although not offered as legal counsel, the enclosed brief statement from Florida State University law professor, Constitutional scholar and ABCNews legal Analyst, Prof. Steven Gey, outlines the issue of constitutionality of the lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution"). He concludes:

Although the Ohio State Board of Education has removed a reference to Jonathan Wells' book, Icons of Evolution, the concepts from Intelligent Design from his book and from references to websites containing Intelligent Design concepts are embedded in the current controversial lesson plan being considered by the Ohio State Board of Education. Accordingly, this plan is not only bad science; it is illegal.

To support his brief public statement we have also enclosed a draft 86 page privileged document of a scholarly article entitled: "IS IT SCIENCE YET? THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS WITH INTELLIGENT DESIGN. Because of its proprietary nature, this draft document is being made available only to you, to the Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro and to Mr. Mathew DeTemple, the Chief Legal Counsel for The Ohio State Board of Education in case you and members of the State Board of Education wish to seek legal counsel on the constitutionality of the lesson in question.

In summary, The Ohio Academy of Science has outlined six significant items that will occur if the State Board of Education approves a defective model science lesson (L10H23 "Critical Analysis of Evolution") at its March 2004 meeting. We ask you to implore your appointees and other members on the State Board not to approve this lesson.

Sincerely,

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