

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / June 16, 2008

Creationist bill clears Louisiana legislature

Louisiana Coalition for Science calls on Governor Jindal to veto SB 733

Baton Rouge, LA, June 16, 2008 — The Louisiana Senate has passed SB 733, a bill that creationists can use to force creationism into public school science classes. The vote accepts an amendment approved by the Louisiana House of Representatives. The amendment allows the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to prohibit certain supplementary instructional materials but gives no guidance about the criteria BESE should use for such prohibition. The LA Coalition for Science (LCFS), a group of concerned parents, teachers and scientists, has called on Gov. Jindal to veto the bill through an open letter on its website at <http://lasciencecoalition.org>.

“This bill doesn't help teachers. It allows local school boards to open the doors of public school science classrooms to creationism with the blessing of the state,” explains LCFS member Barbara Forrest, a professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University. “Governor Jindal surely knows that evolution is not controversial in the mainstream scientific community. He majored in biology at Brown University, and he belongs to a church that considers evolution to be established science and approves of its being taught in its own parochial schools. The LA Family Forum is pushing this bill over the objections of scientists and teachers across the state. The governor has a moral responsibility to Louisiana children to veto this bill.” Forrest was an expert witness on the history of intelligent design creationism in a 2005 federal court case in which teaching intelligent design in public schools was ruled unconstitutional. She is the co-author with Paul R. Gross of *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*.

Arthur Landy, Professor of Molecular and Cell Biology and Biochemistry in the Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University, taught Jindal genetics in college. “Without evolution, modern biology, including medicine and biotechnology, wouldn't make sense,” says Professor Landy. “In order for today's students in Louisiana to succeed in college and beyond, in order for them to take the fullest advantages of all that the 21st century will offer, they need a solid grounding in genetics and evolution. Governor Jindal was a good student in my class when he was thinking about becoming a doctor, and I hope he doesn't do anything that would hold back the next generation of Louisiana's doctors.” Landy is a member of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Academy of Microbiology.

Patsye Peebles, a veteran teacher from Baton Rouge and a member of LCFS, joins the call for Jindal to veto the bill. “If the governor wants to do more for Louisiana schools and their students, he should veto this bill,” insists Peebles. “Teachers don't need the legislature and the governor telling them how to teach science, and we certainly don't need creationist supplementary textbooks being foisted on us. This bill doesn't solve any problems that teachers face, and it promises to create a whole lot of new problems for hard-working teachers.”

In an open letter to Jindal posted on the LCFS website, the group refers to a 1987 U.S. Supreme Court decision which overturned a 1981 creationist law in Louisiana. The letter also points to the involvement of an out-of-state intelligent design think tank in promoting the current legislation. “SB 733 is a thinly disguised attempt to advance the ‘Wedge Strategy’ of the Discovery Institute,” the letter explains. The Discovery Institute, LCFS points out, is “a creationist think tank that is collaborating with the LA Family Forum to get intelligent design (ID) creationism into LA public school science classes.” The letter further warns that “If SB 733 is allowed to become law, we can anticipate the embarrassment that it will bring to the state, not to mention the prospect of spending millions of taxpayer dollars defending the inevitable federal court challenge.” The economic effects of the bill would be more widespread, given the governor's own statement that because of a “skills gap,” the “training and education of our citizens does not meet the requirements of available jobs.” Observing that “SB 733 sends the wrong message to the nation if we want to develop additional high tech companies such as the Pennington Biomedical Research Center, LIGO, and other research universities and centers across the state,” LCFS adds, “SB 733 will sacrifice the education of our children to further the political and religious aims of the LA Family Forum and the Discovery Institute, an out-of-state creationist think tank whose only interest in Louisiana is promoting their agenda at the expense of our children.” The full letter is available online at <http://lasciencecoalition.org>.

Louisiana Coalition for Science is a grassroots group working to protect the teaching of science in Louisiana. On the web at <http://lasciencecoalition.org>.

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