

Louisiana Coalition for Science Supports SB 70 to Repeal the Louisiana Science Education Act

Baton Rouge, LA, April 18, 2011 — In solidarity with Baton Rouge Magnet High School senior Zachary Kopplin's effort to repeal the 2008 Louisiana Science Education Act (www.repealcreationism.com), the Louisiana Coalition for Science supports Senator Karen Carter Peterson's bill, SB 70, which will repeal the law in its entirety. In the interest of Louisiana public school students, the legislature should pass the bill and Gov. Jindal should sign it. (See <http://www.legis.state.la.us/billdata/byinst.asp?sessionid=11RS&billid=SB70&doctype=ALL>.)

Under the guise of promoting "critical thinking," a creationist code term, the Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA) permits public school science teachers to use creationist materials to promote "critical thinking skills, logical analysis, and open and objective discussion of scientific theories being studied including, but not limited to, evolution, the origins of life, global warming, and human cloning."

The LSEA was written by the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF), a Focus on the Family affiliate that promotes creationism as part of its mission "to present biblical principles in the centers of influence." The LFF partnered with the Discovery Institute (DI), a Seattle, Washington, think tank that promotes intelligent design creationism nationwide. DI helped write the LSEA to reflect its "Model Academic Freedom Statute on Evolution," a stealth creationism statute that DI has promoted in almost a dozen states since 2008. So far, no other state has adopted such legislation. (See DI's model statute at www.academicfreedompetition.com/freedom.php.)

The LSEA has had negative effects both on Louisiana and on public school science education policy.

- In August 2008, the president of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology called on scientific societies to boycott states that pass such legislation. On February 5, 2009, the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology informed Gov. Jindal that it would hold its 2011 meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, rather than New Orleans and that they will not return to Louisiana while the LSEA remains in effect. (See www.sicb.org/resources/LouisianaLetterJindal.pdf.)
- In January 2009, the LFF persuaded the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to delete a crucial prohibition against "materials that teach creationism or intelligent design or that advance the religious belief that a supernatural being created humankind" from *Bulletin 741*, the *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators*, which implements the LSEA at the parish level. Consequently, school districts have no clear guidelines prohibiting creationist materials in science classes. Teachers can use anything they want until they get caught. (For the example of Danny Pennington, former West Monroe High School biology teacher, see National Public Radio, "Louisiana Law Protects Evolution Skeptics in Class," February 13, 2009, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100585622.)
- In September 2009, the LFF influenced BESE's *Bulletin 741* policy concerning citizen complaints. The policy stacks the review procedure in favor of creationists when parents or concerned citizens file complaints about creationist materials used in science classes. The policy also undermines Department of Education staff experts. (See Louisiana Coalition for Science, <http://lasciencecoalition.org/2009/09/30/creationists-dictate-bese-policy/>)
- In fall 2010, the LFF tried but failed to block state approval of new biology textbooks for public schools. Nonetheless, LFF Executive Director Rev. Gene Mills vowed to "make crystal clear to superintendents all over Louisiana" that schools are not bound by BESE's approval of the new textbooks (Rev. Gene Mills, *End of Week* newsletter, December 10, 2010).
- In July 2010, invoking the LSEA, the Livingston Parish School Board instructed staff to study using the LSEA to add creationism to the science curriculum for the 2011-2012 academic year. This proves that school boards understand the LSEA as a creationist law. (See "School Board Might OK Teaching Creationism," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, July 24 2010, www.theadvocate.com/news/99153999.html?showAll=y&c=y.)
- The March 15, 2011, Tangipahoa Parish School Board minutes note that board member Sandra Bailey-Simmons told the Curriculum Committee that "Retired Judge Darrell White has requested to come speak to the Committee concerning the Science Education Act." (See www.tangischools.org/BDMinutes/2011/Board%20Minutes%202003-15-11.pdf.) White, an LFF operative, helped promote the LSEA. The April 17, 2011, Hammond, LA, *Sunday Star* reports that the board's April 19 meeting will consider "Curriculum . . . committee reports [that] include discussion about **evolutionism verse [sic] creationism** within the science department" (emphasis added). This information shows that the LFF is using the LSEA to promote flat-out creationism, as LSEA opponents predicted in 2008.

Concerned citizens must call Senate Education Committee members and their respective House and Senate representatives and ask them to vote in favor of SB 70.

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