

Minutes CESE Annual Meeting, June 29, 2013

Out-going president Ken Whiton called the annual CESE meeting to order on Saturday, June 29, 2013 at the Northrop Hall on the University of New Mexico (UNM) campus. Ken asked the audience to pick up a copy of the current *Beacon* newsletter and join CESE. Back issues are available online at CESE.org. Ken thanked everyone for coming and then asked those in the audience to introduce themselves.

After these introductions, Dave Thomas explained how the origin of the moniker “ducks” came about. His father, Dave Thomas, Sr. wrote a letter to the *Albuquerque Journal* editor in June of 1996, in which he pointed out that creationist arguments were like ducks in a shooting gallery. You can shoot them down easily, but they just pop right back up again. Shortly after learning of the New Mexico State Board of Education's decision to omit evolution from the science standards, physicist Mark Boslough sent an e-mail urging action to a few colleagues. The original message line said "TIME TO GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW." Over time, the message line evolved to just "DUCKS."

Ken then asked the CESE board to come up to the front of the room and introduce themselves. He then presented an appreciation plaque award to Kim Johnson and gave all the board members “Darwin Swat Team” buttons.

Ken said goals were set for last year – continuing the “Murfin method” for analyzing data from New Mexico schools and expanding the audience for this work. We are a research driven organization that reaches out to teachers. The press, including the *Albuquerque Journal*, *Los Alamos Monitor* and the *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported and commented on CESE's research on New Mexico's proposed A-F grading system. Board member Jack Jekowski has many connections in the business community to advance education in NM, Ken said. We made an appeal to APS administrators. We were successful in getting one of the best to join us. She has provided useful information we could not have gotten anywhere else so easily.

There was no creationist bill introduced in the past legislative session, Ken reported, although there is concern that it could be massaged through the new science standards.

Ken introduced Dave Thomas who performed, “Something completely different, the Bouncing Balls of Banzini.” The video of this magic trick can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT5e4eCltpk>

After Dave’s trick, Ken introduced next year’s slate of officers:

Terry Dunbar, president
Patty Finley, vice-president
Marilyn Savitt-Kring, secretary
Steve Brugge, treasurer

There were no new nominations. The slate was approved, and Ken handed the presidential gavel to Terry Dunbar. Terry said that a year ago Ken was reluctant to take the CESE presidency, but he did a fine job. Terry said that Ken has “power.” We couldn’t find the ladies room in Northrop Hall, so Ken temporarily reassigned one of the men’s rooms to the women.

Terry then said, according to a study by Annie E. Casey Foundation, New Mexico ranked 50th in the nation in child welfare. The areas analyzed were economics, education, health, and family and community. Statistics in the wrong hands can yield bad results, and CESE knows how to remove the demographic factors to evaluate schools, Terry said. *Albuquerque Journal* (on the day of this meeting) reported the results of the state’s Standards-Based Assessment scores (SBA). According to this article, most schools remained the same, with the exception of high schools, whose scores improved. Terry questioned whether there was true improvement. This year students’ graduation depends on the results of these tests, and kids are sick of the excessive testing.

Our first goal is to continue Walt Murfin’s work, currently transferred to Dave Thomas, and Kim and Jesse Johnson. The *Next Generation Science Standards* are all geared to the college bound. We need to reach other students also. Other countries have fewer standards, but more depth. The *Common Core Standards* are replacing *No Child Left Behind*, but the testing mania continues. Terry asked Lisa Durkin, a high school science teacher, to speak about the excessive testing.

Lisa said testing interrupted six weeks of instruction this school year. It started with All English Language Learner (ELL) students taking the assessment for English language learners, which takes a day. On the second week, the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA) was given. That took two days for sophomores and three days for juniors. During week three, there was short cycle testing for freshmen and sophomores where students are pulled out of class individually for reading and math tests. Week four, sophomores and juniors took the end of course (EOC) exams in five subjects that the teachers must grade. Week five, any student who attended advanced placement (AP) courses had to take those exams. Week six, students take their regular final exams. During that same time, students that had been absent took make-up exams. The end result is less time for instruction. Lisa said her biology final exam results for this past semester were dismal. It is absurd that the state Public Education Department (PED) requires all this testing, and schools will pay the price for diminished results in student achievement.

Terry added that teachers are sick of the excessive testing as well. He said he had to take “Blackboard Online Teaching Course.” All students now must take one online course in addition to the regular curriculum.

Terry concluded by saying there are no silver bullet solutions, and data must be understood to address problems in education.

Ken then introduced our keynote speaker Zack Kopplin. Zack is creating a national movement advocating science in public schools. This introduction and Zack's speech can be viewed online at:

<http://www.cese.org/videos-of-annual-meeting-are-on-line/>

Ken continued: only 19 years of age, he has been leading the attack in Louisiana against the anti-evolutionists in science education. His work is timely, especially in New Mexico as we are home to the Rio Grande Foundation, which is funded by the Koch Brothers, through the Heritage Foundation, that says it is okay for charter schools taking public money to teach creationism, as it is "free market." Zack has appeared on "Moyers in Company" with Bill Moyers. Ken said he has been trying to get on that show for years, and "they won't return my calls." Zack has also been on the Bill Maher show, and Ken said he doesn't get any calls back from Bill either. Zack is all over YouTube. Zack is schooling everyone he can on what science is and is not. Ken's favorite Zack line, among many, is from an interview in *Church and State* magazine when he was asked how he got involved in the battle, and Zack said, "I kept waiting for the adults to step forward, and they didn't, so it was up to me." And there is a lesson for everybody – we shouldn't be waiting for somebody else to step up, Ken said.

Zack thanked us for having him as our guest. He said it is really unfortunate that his home state is addicted to creationism. The Supreme Court ruled that creationism is not science in the *Edwards v. Aguillard* case. But Louisiana didn't learn its lesson. In 2008, it passed the "Louisiana Education Act." This time creationism, or its offshoot, intelligent design wasn't mentioned. Barbara Forrest (philosophy professor at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana and evolution-activist) testified in the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* case. She helped expose intelligent design as dressed up creationism. But what the 2008 bill said was that supplementary materials can be brought in to critique controversial theories, such as creationism, climate change, and human cloning. These topics are not scientifically controversial, but are politically controversial. We don't need permission to bring in supplementary materials if they are good, so we know what this law is about, especially considering who is backing it.

This legislation was introduced by Louisiana State Senator Ben Nevers, who said straight out what it was for, Zack continued. The Louisiana Family Forum, a creationism group and one of the most powerful lobbyists in the state asked for that law. They wanted creationism presented wherever Darwin's theory of evolution was taught. Their governor, Bobby Jindal, signed this legislation into law. When he was on NBC News Education Nation a few months ago, Jindal said we have what is called the "Science Education Act," and if a teacher wants to supplement these materials, and the state school board is okay with that, they can supplement those materials. Jindal said he has no problem with state or local school boards allowing creationism or intelligent design to be taught.

The Louisiana state Board of Education was originally trying to implement policy around this law. They tried to ban creationism and intelligent design in the classroom. When the

creationists got wind of that, they got that policy thrown out. Now there is no defense against creationism being taught in Louisiana schools.

Creationism is not science, Zack continued. It doesn't fit the scientific method. It is not testable, and its results are not repeatable or falsifiable. If you teach creationism in biology, students will really struggle over what is and is not science. If you throw out the scientific method, none of the sciences are safe. Besides threatening evolution, it threatens climate science. The Louisiana coastline is rapidly vanishing, and we really are feeling the effects of climate change, Zack explained. Tennessee passed a copycat law. New Mexico was able to vote its version down, when it was introduced; however, Representative Tom Anderson in the NM state House could introduce the same bill again. So we have to keep fighting this.

And that's what I've been doing -- taking on the "Louisiana Education Act," Zack said. The first step was finding a mentor -- Dr. Barbara Forrest is one of the foremost experts on intelligent design in the country. In the Kitzmiller v. Dover trial, she proved intelligent design is not science. Luckily she lives about 25 minutes away from Zack in Livingston Parish in LA, which is a local hotbed of creationism. In 2010 right after this law was passed, the Livingston Parish school board was quite clear about wanting someone with religious views in the science classroom. They didn't want a lawsuit, but they were willing to risk one "for Jesus."

So Zack met with Barbara, and they began a repeal campaign. The next step was to find a sponsor. When the "Louisiana Education" bill passed, there were only three votes against it in the entire legislature, so they knew who to ask for a repeal bill, Zack explained. So Zack contacted Louisiana State Senator Karen Carter Peterson. He started to explain to her that creationism wasn't science, but she cut him off and wanted to know when they would get started. They were told they were going against the governor and the entire state legislature, so why are they even trying? (Zack said they lost 5 to 1 that first year.)

Zack showed some videos during their Senate education committee hearings:

Louisiana state Senator Julie Quinn stated she was an attorney and didn't care how many letters people had after their names:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e2zPfsNe-w>

Senator Peterson stated that a number of scientific organizations and Nobel laureates urged that they repeal the act.

Zack said the second year; they only lost 2 to 1.

Another video showed Louisiana State Senator Walsworth:

The senator asked during a committee hearing when they were debating SB 364, the attempt to repeal the “Science Education Act,” if there were any concrete examples of how evolution could be taught in the classroom. A science teacher tried to explain to the senator how frozen vials of *E. coli* bacteria evolve over time. Senator Walsworth asked how long this would take and would the bacteria evolve into a person.

<http://gawker.com/5978464/louisiana-senator-wants-to-know-if-e-coli-could-evolve-into-a-human>

The bill failed in committee.

In another video, Louisiana State Senator Walsworth said evolution is a “theory in crisis” in light of the tremendous advances in made in “molecular” in biology, biochemistry, and genetics in the past few years.

<https://twitter.com/RepealtheLSEA/status/292370745705779203>

And the next year, they got 2 votes and lost 3 to 2, best so far, Zack said. They moved on, not just doubting evolution, however, but now modern medicine as well.

The next one is the most astounding so far, Zack said.

“LA Senator Elbert Guillory explained he wants to keep Louisiana’s creationist law because of a witch doctor.”

source:

<http://lybio.net/elbert-guillory-legislator-argues-for-witch-doctors-in-science-class/news-politics/>

Senator Guillory said, “I’m concerned that we might shut off the presentation of ideas... by declaring one science, or another as pseudoscience...”

“This doctor practiced in an open circle in a dusty spot. He wore no shoes, was semi-clothed, and used a lot of bones that he threw around.

“I bet that all of us would agree that his science is a pseudoscience. We would not have respect for his science and the practice of his science. That would concern me, because if we were able to declare what I have verified as something that has some validity to it, I mean, the stuff the man told me about my history...”

“If I closed my mind when I saw this man in the dust throwing some bones on the ground, semi-clothed, if I had closed him off, and just said, ‘That’s not science. I’m not gonna see this doctor,’ I would have shut off a very good experience for myself, and

actually would not have discovered some things I needed to do when I got home to see my doctor.”

Despite the pushback from the Louisiana legislature, Zack said they have made some amazing progress, at least in building a coalition. Seventy-eight Nobel laureates, major science organizations, thousands of clergy members and teachers, and thousands of citizens around the country are asking Louisiana to repeal this law.

You would think Governor Jindal has done all he could do to damage science education in Louisiana, but they were wrong, Zack continued. Last spring, Jindal created the school voucher program. Some of these schools were using curriculum that said the Loch Ness monster and dragons were real and that this disproves evolution. They breathe fire through glands in their noses. Also dinosaurs lived with humans. And these schools are slated for state public money. At first, it seemed like only one school was doing this.

Some research revealed about 20 additional schools are teaching creationism and are advertising it on their website. And they are calling scientists simple men. In their handbooks, students will be required to defend creationism against traditional scientific theory because they do not want that in their classrooms.

They were originally slated for approximately \$11 million in public money. Then they got hit with bad publicity. After the outcry of what they were teaching, that they didn't meet fire code, and that they didn't have classrooms, the amount decreased to about \$4 million in the first year. And that was just the tip of the iceberg in Louisiana.

Further documentation revealed that there are 300 schools in 10 states and Washington, D.C. receiving \$100 million plus of public money to teach creationism. One school in Florida called evolution the way of the heathen. Some schools in Indiana travel to visit the creationist museum. Jindal signed the law to create voucher program and has been defending it ever since. There's a provision in the Louisiana constitution against teaching creationism, but they're ignoring it.

Despite all the work they have done, it's an uphill battle, and people have asked why they do this, Zack said. Why not write off Louisiana as a lost cause? -- because it's ground zero for a much larger fight for science in America. It's a fight over evolution. It's a fight over climate change. It's a fight over science funding. Congress just cut about \$50 billion from science funding in the next 5 years, and about 80 billion over the next 10 years, which is a devastating amount.

One of Zack's favorite quotes was from President Kennedy's speech at Rice University, in 1962:

“We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge

is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.”

That’s exactly what we intend to do, Zack said, and that we need to have a science revolution. We need to start funding more science. We need to teach our kids that evolution is real. Climate change is happening, and scientists are not simple men. If we don’t, we have a choice of two futures ahead of us. There are real threats ahead of us that can be solved by science. Super bugs that are resistant to antibiotics -- if we don’t accept evolution, we’re going to have a lot of trouble combating that. If we don’t fund science, there’s that recent meteorite that exploded over Russian. We face threats of asteroids in the future, if we don’t take steps to prevent it.

When we discover something, we have that research forever, Zack continued. Paving roads is a good investment, but they have to be repaved eventually. If we fund science, it’s one of the best investments that can be made. It will pay off. It was recently announced that \$14.5 billion was spent on the human genome project. The government got back about \$60 billion in increased tax revenues, and about one trillion dollars in increased economic activity. If a student takes out a loan to go to college, it’s an investment that will pay for itself. If someone takes out a loan to start a business, it is expected that it will also pay for itself. If we want to tackle problems like the debt, we should invest more in science because it’s a smart investment that over the long term will also pay for itself.

And that is where Zack thinks we should go. He called for a major reinvestment in science funding. He wants to see a trillion dollars in science funding over the long term because it’s a smart investment. He wants to see the end of legislation like the *Louisiana Science Education Act*, and an end to the Texas state Board of Education’s attempt to place in science textbooks that evolution is controversial. This action could affect the entire country.

And that’s what Zack is fighting for. *Why we need a Second Giant Leap*. He hopes that we will all join him and keep up the great work being done in NM. He thanked everyone again for coming and having him as our guest speaker.

Following Zack’s talk were questions and answers that can be viewed online at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id-MtEdNNCE>

After the meeting, we adjourned for refreshments.

Respectfully submitted,

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