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Bill Opens Door to Religion

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A recent full-page ad by the Intelligent Design Network (IDnet), New Mexico Division, accuses scientists of conspiracy, using "codes" and other absurdities. The ad's purpose is to promote a bill that has been introduced in the House by Rep. Thomas A. Anderson.

We believe that Anderson might have been taken in by this group. We assume that he did not understand what he was given. Had he understood, he would have known that key parts of the bill have been declared illegal in federal court (Kitzmiller, et. al., vs. the Dover School District, 2005.)

Briefly, intelligent design traces its roots to creationism, which is not allowed to be taught in school as science. It may be taught about in other settings — but not as science.

This bill was written by a religious group to ensure that its pseudoscience could enter the science classroom. We fully understand that anyone can err, but Anderson's error could place the state and local school boards in grave danger of losing funding due to lost lawsuits.

Here is a short analysis of the bill that briefly demonstrates the problems.

The bill states that a teacher shall not be prohibited by a school's administrators from informing students about strengths and weaknesses in scientific theories, providing the topics being taught are from the science standards. Any teacher who chooses to do this shall not be punished, etc.

However, a teacher already must teach from the science standards based on mainstream science. If there are any mainstream scientific uncertainties in the topic matter, they will be taught.

This is redundant to existing rules and regulations, but it opens the door for the teacher to decide to teach religious material that is not mainstream science. This allows a teacher to teach astrology or creationism in a classroom, given the bill's false definition of "scientific information." This protects teachers who violate the law.

The bill states that it doesn't mean that religion can be taught. That is disingenuous. The bill actually enables religion to be taught as "science."

Real science requires that natural effects can be explained using only natural causes. Religion is supernatural. Religion may be correct, but it is not science.

Scientists of all religions should get the same answers. Science is neutral toward religion. This bill opens the door to all religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Native American, etc., to be taught as science.

The bill states that students may not be penalized for believing in whatever they wish to believe. This is true now! This is redundant with the First Amendment.

The examples in the bill deemed "controversial" are: "biological origins" (not even a scientific term), "biological evolution," "human cloning" (not a topic in the standards), and "causes of climate changes." Of those covered by the standards, only mainstream science conclusions are to be taught. Any actual scientific controversies that may exist should already be discussed. This does not require a separate bill.

Finally, the bill defines what "scientific information" means. It is inappropriate because it leaves out the term mainstream. Science is a method of learning about the natural world. It does not give equal weight to just anyone's "theories." The definition is incomplete and not accepted in the scientific community and would allow a science teacher to bring in an astrologer or flat earther and call it science.

We hope that Anderson withdraws this bill. If anyone receives complaints about violations of a student's rights or failure to discuss the full mainstream science position of a topic in the science standards, please come to us. We will fight with you. The tools already exist to counter this. But this bill is terribly wrong. This bill is primarily written by a religious group to promote their specific pseudoscience in science classrooms.

This column was submitted for the Coalition for Excellence in Science and Math Education.

http://www.abqjournal.com/opinion/guest_columns/21221715opinion02-21-11.htm#ixzz1mf7jXtHV