

May 26, 2011

To: Louisiana State Legislators

Dear Honorable Legislator,

We are Ph.D. scientists concerned about the lack of scientific objectivity in science education. It has recently come to our attention that evolution activists are trying to pressure the Louisiana State Legislature into repealing the Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA), passed in 2008 by an overwhelming bipartisan majority. In particular, we have learned that a document from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* has been distributed to legislators, with the apparent intent to intimidate legislators into opposing academic freedom.

**The vocal activists who oppose the LSEA are seeking to confuse the issue, since the LSEA is not about creationism. In fact, when a group of Nobel Laureates recently signed a letter calling for the repeal of the LSEA,<sup>1</sup> it is noteworthy that their letter refused to quote from the law itself and instead harped upon the distraction of “creationism.” The truth is that LSEA does not permit teaching for or against any religious viewpoint.**

While the LSEA is not about religion, it's clear that some of the Nobel Laureates who oppose the LSEA are motivated by their own metaphysical concerns—with a purpose to destroy religion. As Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg (who signed the letter opposing the LSEA) has said:

“[T]he teaching of modern science is corrosive of religious belief, and I'm all for that! One of the things that in fact has driven me in my life, is the feeling that this is one of the great social functions of science—to free people from superstition.”<sup>2</sup>

Nine of the signers also signed a 2005 letter which called evolution “an **unguided, unplanned** process of **random** variation and natural selection.”<sup>3</sup> Five of them signed the Third Humanist Manifesto, an aggressive statement of the humanist agenda to create a world with “without supernaturalism” based upon the view that “[h]umans are ... the result of unguided evolutionary change” and the universe is “self-existing.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Barbara Forrest, one of the main leaders of the movement opposing the LSEA, is a member of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association.<sup>5</sup>

These people are welcome to believe whatever they wish, but it seems clear that key prominent critics of the LSEA are metaphysically motivated. When they obsess about the alleged motives

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.repealcreationism.com/397/41-nobel-laureates-send-a-letter-to-the-louisiana-legislature/>

<sup>2</sup> Steven Weinberg, “Free People From Superstition,” *Freethought Today*  
<http://www.ffrf.org/legacy/ftoday/2000/april2000/weinberg.html> (April, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity: Nobel Laureates Initiative  
[http://media.ljworld.com/pdf/2005/09/15/nobel\\_letter.pdf](http://media.ljworld.com/pdf/2005/09/15/nobel_letter.pdf) (emphases added) (September 9, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> “Humanist Manifesto III”

[http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/About\\_Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_III](http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III)

“Notable Signers” of Humanist Manifesto

[http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/About\\_Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_III/Notable\\_Signers](http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III/Notable_Signers)

<sup>5</sup> “Who’s Who, NOSHA’s Board of Directors” <http://www.nosha.secularhumanism.net/who.html>

behind the LSEA, they are engaging in what psychologists call *projection*. But as this letter will make clear, the LSEA is not about religion, but about science.

The purpose of this letter is to help you understand the LSEA and also see that these vocal critics do not speak for the entire scientific community, nor are they telling you the truth about LSEA. The truth is that they are misrepresenting the Act in order to intimidate those who would protect academic freedom.

If Darwin were alive today, he would urge us to teach his theory objectively. In *Origin of Species*, Darwin explained that “a fair result can be obtained only by fully stating and balancing the facts and arguments on both sides of each question.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, leading science education theorists agree that students learn science best when taught “to discriminate between evidence that supports ... or does not support”<sup>7</sup> a given concept. The LSEA was adopted for the purpose of implementing such an objective approach when teaching controversial topics like evolution. Unfortunately, many modern defenders of Darwin’s ideas reject his advice when teaching evolution.

**For example, the NAS’s *Science, Evolution and Creationism* booklet directly works against the scientific process by unscientifically elevating evolution to the status of unquestionable dogma.** The booklet asserts that the “call to ‘teach the controversy’ [over evolution] is unwarranted” because “[t]here is no scientific controversy about the basic facts of evolution,” and evolution is “so well established that no new evidence is likely to alter” it. ***This is not a scientific approach.***

But there is much credible scientific dissent from neo-Darwinian evolution. In addition to the 15 scientists who have signed this letter, over 800 Ph.D. scientists have signed a statement declaring that they “are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. **Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged**” (see [www.dissentfromdarwin.com](http://www.dissentfromdarwin.com)). Scientific critiques of modern Darwinian theory have a legitimate scientific basis in peer-reviewed scientific studies and teaching students about these scientific arguments against Darwinian evolution *in no way* injects religion into the classroom. None of this means that therefore Darwinian evolution is wrong. What it means is that there is credible scientific dissent from Darwinian evolution that should neither be ignored nor censored from students.

Unfortunately, the NAS is treating Darwinian evolution like religious dogma rather than science. The NAS’s proclamations are dangerous to science education because they refuse to allow students to ask hard questions, and would force them to treat evolution in an unscientific fashion.

*It is precisely this dogmatic mindset that the LSEA seeks to remedy.* No wonder the NAS opposes the LSEA, since the law permits teachers 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.”

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859).

<sup>7</sup> See Jonathan Osborne, “Arguing to Learn in Science: The Role of Collaborative, Critical Discourse,” *Science*, 328: 463-466 (April 23, 2010).

The LSEA is about improving science education by promoting objective instruction, not pushing religion. We, the undersigned, are scientists who support objective science education when it comes to all controversial scientific theories, including neo-Darwinian evolution. **If science educators follow the approach of LSEA-critics, science education will become science indoctrination.** The few scientists who are pressuring you to repeal the LSEA do not understand the law, or are purposefully misconstruing the law, and do not speak for many scientists who support open and objective inquiry.

True objectivity in science education demands that the LSEA remain in force. Louisiana should be proud that it is leading the way in science education. We urge you to retain the LSEA.

Signed:

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Charles Garner, Ph.D.

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