

**HB 1551 by Kern – *Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act*
Distortion and Deception Revisited**

The wording of this bill is virtually identical to SB 320 introduced by Brogdon in 2009 (failed in Education Committee). Identical bills, apparently written by the creationist Discovery Institute, have been introduced in several other states over the last several years. They are cleverly worded to sound as if not promoting religious views in order to skirt the first amendment establishment clause and recent court rulings. However, the religious motivations of Rep. Kern (and the Discovery Institute) are abundantly clear. The terms “academic freedom”, “strengths and weaknesses”, and “scientific information” are well-known euphemisms used in order to cast doubt on established science and introduce religious counter-arguments in science classrooms.

The bill states:

2A. . . . teaching of some scientific subjects, such as biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning, can cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects.

The controversies are purely religious and political. The reason some teachers may be unsure of how to teach evolution, etc., is due to religiously-motivated interference from parents and community leaders. Why single out evolution, origins of life, global warming, and human cloning? What about nuclear weapons? These are equally controversial (but apparently not in this religious context) but the science is not questioned. Evolution is not scientifically controversial, period.

2B. . . . assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

This indicates that there are legitimate scientific weaknesses in evolutionary theory and casts doubt on the entire scientific enterprise. Teaching students that they can disregard the parts of science they don't happen to like is simply irresponsible.

2C. . . . shall not prohibit any teacher in a school district in this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

What are the weaknesses? What should teachers teach? The National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have not found any legitimate scientific weaknesses but we expect high school teachers to discuss so-called weaknesses in class?

2D. Students may be evaluated based upon their understanding of course materials, but no student in any public school or institution shall be penalized in any way because the student may subscribe to a particular position on scientific theories.

This is vague. It would seem to allow any position to count on assignments or exams.

2E. . . . shall only protect the teaching of scientific information,

The term scientific information is not defined here. Creation scientists and intelligent design proponents claim to be doing science – they are not but their propaganda might be interpreted to be scientific information by some teachers or school administrators.

This bill will harm the Oklahoma economy, bring costly lawsuits, and irreparably harm our students' education in science.