

Why SB 758 by Brecheen Is a Bad Bill

It is difficult to see what the point of the bill actually is, as virtually every point is already covered in Oklahoma curriculum standards. Teachers have been encouraging, “students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills and respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about controversial issues” for decades. Nothing in the bill explains why we need a state law specifying what teachers already (are required to) do. This is simply a waste of the Senate’s time. Nonetheless, the bill has ulterior motives if one knows the creationist code in which the bill is written and these motives have nothing to do with science or critical thinking.

- Sen. Brecheen has made explicit statements in the press, (that he would) “introduce a bill to place creationism into public schools”; and later, “I have introduced legislation requiring every publically funded Oklahoma school to teach the debate of creation vs. evolution using the known science, even that which conflicts with Darwin’s religion.” His own words make his anti-science intentions abundantly clear.
- There are two well known, anti-science tactics in this bill:
 1. The catchphrase “scientific strengths and weaknesses” was developed by a creationist think tank (Discovery Institute) and used in its model “academic freedom act”. This includes prefabricated language that has been introduced in many state legislatures (but passed only in Louisiana where it is now being challenged). The sole purpose of such bills is to provide cover to those that would promote the illegitimate “scientific creationism” or “intelligent design” in school science classes.
 2. The bill promotes the use of “scientific information” by teachers in presenting controversial topics. “Scientific information” is a loaded term that is not defined in the bill. Anyone with any understanding of science would have instead referred to “scientific evidence”, “testable hypotheses”, “experiments”, or “peer reviewed publications”. “Scientific information” could mean anything from crackpot pseudoscience websites to the creationist “curriculum” available from the Discovery Institute. This is, again, a code-phrase understood by those who would introduce religion into science classes.
- SB 758 is nothing but a sham, intended to allow back-door promotion of religiously motivated, anti-science material into Oklahoma science classes.
- This will clearly confuse our students about the nature of science, inhibit their ability to understand important scientific issues facing society, and reduce their competitiveness for science related jobs.
- Passage of bills such as SB 758 will clearly harm the ability of Oklahoma to attract scientists and science-based industries.
- If the creationist intentions of SB 758 are actually implemented in the classroom, school districts will undoubtedly face costly challenges in the courts (with costs borne by the taxpayers).