

SENATE BILL 893

By Watson

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,
Chapter 6, Part 10, relative to teaching scientific
subjects in elementary schools.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 10, is amended by adding the following as a new, appropriately designated section:

(a) The general assembly finds that:

(1) An important purpose of science education is to inform students about scientific evidence and to help students develop critical thinking skills necessary to becoming intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed citizens;

(2) The teaching of some scientific subjects, including, but not limited to, biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning, can cause controversy; and

(3) Some teachers may be unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects.

(b) The state board of education, public elementary and secondary school governing authorities, directors of schools, school system administrators, and public elementary and secondary school principals and administrators shall endeavor to create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages 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.

(c) The state board of education, public elementary and secondary school governing authorities, directors of schools, school system administrators, and public elementary and secondary school principals and administrators shall endeavor to assist teachers to find effective ways to present the science curriculum as 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 covered in the course being taught.

(d) Neither the state board of education, nor any public elementary or secondary school governing authority, director of schools, school system administrator, or any public elementary or secondary school principal or administrator shall prohibit any teacher in a public school system of this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course being taught.

(e) This section only protects the teaching of scientific information, and shall not be construed to promote any religious or non-religious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or non-beliefs, or promote discrimination for or against religion or non-religion.

SECTION 2. By no later than the start of the 2011-2012 school term, the department of education shall notify all directors of schools of the provisions of this act. Each director shall notify all employees within the director's school system of the provisions of this act.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.