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EDITORIAL

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**GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT MANDATE TEACHING
INTELLIGENT DESIGN AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO
EVOLUTION**

In the next several weeks, the US District Court in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania will rule on whether the notion of “intelligent design” may be legally taught in the high school science classroom. The court case of *Kitzmiller et al v. Dover Area School District, et al* is the latest battle of the decades-long conflict between anti-evolutionists and scientists over the teaching of evolution in public schools. The position of *SCIPOLICY JOURNAL* is that government should not mandate the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution, and it is wiser for government to not encroach on the methods of science.

The Dover Area School District mandates that a statement be read to students in biology classes announcing that “Intelligent Design” is an alternative theory to Evolution. According to School District Administration, the content and procedure of the announcement were “...developed to provide its ninth grade Biology students with a balanced view and not to teach or present religious beliefs...” and “...teaching intelligent design is not part of the ninth-grade biology curriculum and students will not be tested on this subject” (Defendants' Statement of Material Facts, Nos. 23, 25). However, the School District Administration fails to explain how stamping official imprimatur on an essentially faith based concept promotes a “balanced view” of science in a public school

setting and further, identify what educational value there is in a bland reference to intelligent design? Moreover, the Administration defends the mandate as devoid of teaching content, and it suggests that teaching is different from making announcements about the existence of possible alternative explanations to evolution. However, the proffered rationale is not supported by generally accepted principles in educational psychology and psycho-educational processes, which treat the teacher as a very powerful influence on students. Additionally, the mandate has an institutional influence, conveying legitimacy to the notion of intelligent design when in fact such notion is not sanctioned by the scientific community - including The National Academies (of Science), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the panoply of physical science professional groups and associations.

Quality education, especially in the teaching of science at the high school level, depends upon the exposure of students to the important intellectual history and philosophical inquiries that shed light on the authority of science. Science teaching, to be valid, should foster an understanding of the discovery process and the way that scientific theories come into being and change over time as discoveries are made and new knowledge is developed. The importance of teaching critical and rational thinking -- processes that require the comparative reading and analysis of literature in an unbiased environment -- is denied when the alternative of "intelligent design" is simply announced as "an alternative theory."

There is a logical fallacy in mandating the inclusion of intelligent design since it provides neither scientific explanation nor empirical evidence of the actual existence of a designer, but through fiat simply asserts that a designer must exist to explain the gap in knowledge. Stripped of its intellectual facade the announcement is nothing but a transparent effort to engraft religious dogma onto the classroom examination of scientific theory.

There is no challenge here to the legitimacy of the concern among some groups about the erosion of family value and the proliferation of crime and drug abuse among the young. These same groups are free to espouse the view that the root cause of these conditions is the deterioration of the role of religion and faith in daily life. However, the School

District's blatant attempt to introduce spiritual considerations into science as a means of promoting religion is intellectually biased and totally unacceptable.

There can be no challenge to the right of parents to expose their children to secular views. And, especially in the arena of public education, we are long past the time when there can be a legitimate challenge to the co-extensive right of parents to insulate their children from secular views. Instantly, the School District Administration devised a mechanism to impose religious views on an entire public school community. We have no quarrel with the right to harbor faith and to espouse it. We do, however, maintain that the School District Administration has no right to proselytize others in a public school setting or to introduce explicitly religious notions (such as intelligent design) into public school curricula. And we have requested the Court to declare the policy of the Dover Area School District to be violative of constitutional principles.

SCIPOLICY filed an Amicus Curiae brief in the present case, which expounds the points in this editorial. The brief is available for review on the SCIPOLICY website: <http://scipolicy.net> . ###

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