



National Association of Geoscience Teachers

27 March 2012

Dear Members of the Oklahoma Senate Education Committee:

On behalf of the National Association of Geoscience Teachers, of whom I am president, I am writing to express opposition to HB 1551. The National Association of Geoscience Teachers (NAGT) recognizes that the scientific theory of evolution is a foundational concept of science, and therefore must also be a cornerstone of science education. NAGT fully agrees with and supports the scientific validity of evolution as reflected in the position statements of the numerous scientific societies that unanimously support evolution on scientific grounds. NAGT further maintains that the scientific theory of evolution should be taught to students of all grade levels as a unifying concept without distraction of non-scientific or anti-scientific influence.

NAGT also joins many prestigious organizations of scientists, including the National Academies of Science (2005), the American Geophysical Union (2003, 2007), the American Chemical Society (2004), and the Geological Society of America (2006), in affirming the conclusions of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in position statements on climate change that call for intensive public education, increased awareness, and action on this important issue.

In science, disagreements are subject to rules of scientific evaluation, and this includes the methodologies of teaching scientific concepts. Scientific conclusions are tested by experiment, observation, and evaluation. Sound practices of scientific education are tested and evaluated much the same way. NAGT recognizes that invoking non-naturalistic or supernatural events or beings are not scientific in character, do not conform to the scientific usage of the word theory, and should not be part of valid science curricula.

The purpose of the NAGT is to foster improvements in the teaching of the earth sciences at all levels of formal and informal instruction, to emphasize the relevance and cultural significance of the earth sciences, and to disseminate knowledge in this field to educators and the general public. The NAGT fully accepts its role in the evaluation and betterment of the teaching of scientific evolution in formal and informal educational settings, with the explicit goal of helping everyone to understand the scientific merit this fundamental concept has in modern science.

HB 1551 focuses on providing guidance to teachers and allowing the use of supplementary materials regarding the promotion of critical thinking. We agree that critical thinking is an essential skill for all students, one which is already embedded in the teaching of science. But "alternative" materials seem designed to introduce non-scientific content into the classroom. The content of science consists of peer-reviewed, tested and confirmed results, not debates based on political or religious convictions. We are convinced that rigorous science education in Oklahoma is badly served by HB 1551, and we urge you to veto this legislation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Wright, Ph.D.
President