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[Home](#) > Barbara Forrest on Chris Comer's forced resignation

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12.05.2007

[Barbara Forrest on Chris Comer's forced resignation](#) [3]

Statement Regarding Texas Education Agency's Termination of Chris Comer, Texas Director of Science

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December 5, 2007

In forcing Chris Comer to resign as Texas Director of Science, the Texas Education Agency has confirmed in a most public, unfortunate way the central point of my Austin presentation, "Inside Creationism's Trojan Horse," the mere announcement of which TEA used as an excuse to terminate her: the intelligent design (ID) creationist movement is about politics, religion, and power. If anyone had any doubts about how mean-spirited ID politics is, this episode should erase them. Texas school children depend on the adults at the TEA to protect the quality of their education. For the last nine years at the TEA, after twenty-seven years as a science teacher, Ms. Comer was doing her part, and she got fired for doing it. The children are ultimately the losers.

The fact that this current episode has happened in Texas is not at all surprising given Texas Board of Education chair and ID supporter Dr. Don McLeroy's statements in a 2005 pro-ID lecture at Grace Bible Church:

Creationists have been making these design arguments, but the birth of the intelligent design movement probably did start at SMU [Southern Methodist University, site of the ID movement's first conference], [in] 1992. It was here that [Phillip Johnson] and Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, and William Dembski, debated with . . . influential Darwinists the proposition that neo-Darwinism [depends] on a prior commitment to naturalism. Johnson . . . states, 'Once it becomes clear that Darwinism rests on a dogmatic philosophy rather than on the weight of the evidence, the way will be opened for dissenting opinions [i.e., intelligent design creationism] to get a fair hearing.' They hadn't got there yet. We don't have a fair hearing yet. But, we gotta keep working on it. This is not something that happens overnight. (The transcript and the audio recording of McLeroy's speech are available here: <http://www.tfn.org/site/PageServer?pagename=mcleroylecture> [4].)

With Ms. Comer's termination, the process of gaining that hearing appears to have advanced quite a bit.

The rationale given by TEA employee Monica Martinez, who wrote the memo recommending Ms. Comer's termination, is not credible. Ms. Martinez contends that "Ms. Comer's email implies endorsement of the speaker and implies that TEA endorses the speaker's position on a subject on which the agency must remain neutral." First, Ms. Comer's merely passing along an "FYI" about a public lecture implies nothing of the sort. (For the text of the announcement from the National Center for Science Education that she sent, see <http://ncse.com/news/2007/11/texas-education-official-forced-to-resign-over-evolution-001143> [5].) But that point notwithstanding, since my Austin talk was about the intelligent design creationist movement, one wonders why TEA would even want to remain "neutral" concerning the ID movement's goal of undermining the integrity of science education in the very public schools that TEA should be protecting from that movement's efforts.

Ms. Martinez continued, "Thus, sending this e-mail compromises the agency's role in the TEKS revision process by creating the perception that TEA has a biased position on a subject directly related to the science education TEKS." But why would the TEA be concerned about being biased in favor of teaching children the truth about science? The TEA's proper role is to ensure the quality and integrity of what is taught in Texas science classes. My Austin presentation was most certainly not a threat to that role, but in fact highly supportive of it. I presented the truth about ID as established by years of scholarly research. Has the process of administering the public education system in Texas become so politicized that even the truth is a threat to people's jobs? One can only conclude that it has.

Ultimately, the TEA's firing of Chris Comer is a by-product of the relentless promotion of ID for more than a decade by creationists at the Discovery Institute. In the wake of court decisions ruling that it is unconstitutional to teach creationism in the public schools, ID creationists, a significant number of whose central figures live in Texas, launched the effort that they formalized in their 1998 "Wedge Strategy" document, which outlines their twenty-year plan to "wedge" ID into the cultural and educational mainstream. (See <http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html> [6].) First Kansas, then Ohio, and most recently Dover, Pennsylvania, have experienced firsthand the attacks on their school systems that were produced, either directly or indirectly, by the Discovery Institute's campaign, as stated in that document, "to see [intelligent] design theory permeate our religious, cultural, moral and political life."

In 2003, Discovery Institute creationists tried, unsuccessfully, to influence the adoption of Texas biology textbooks. Texans should now prepare themselves for an attempt by the same people (and/or newly recruited supporters) to influence the upcoming review of state science standards. In order to be ready,

the good citizens of Texas who value their public schools and the U. S. Constitution must familiarize themselves with the ID code terms they are likely to hear, all of which signal the ID movement's attack on the teaching of evolution. ID supporters will declare that they certainly do not favor eliminating evolution or teaching intelligent design, but rather that they simply want children to hear "both sides" of the "controversy" and to learn to "critically analyze" evolutionary theory, so that they can understand the "strengths and weaknesses" of evolution, and all of this will be for the sake of "fairness" and "academic freedom." (For an explanation of these ID code terms, see my article, "Understanding the Intelligent Design Creationist Movement: Its True Nature and Goals," pp. 19-22, at <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/intelligent-design.pdf> [7].)

In fact, some members of the Texas Board of Education seem to have already mastered the Discovery Institute's code language. Dr. McLeroy recently stated that "Anything taught in science has to have consensus in the science community -- and intelligent design does not." (*Dallas Morning News*, August 23, 2007, <http://religionblog.dallasnews.com/2007/08/state-educatioon-board-opposes.html> [8]) He added, however, that he was dissatisfied with the fact that current biology textbooks don't cover the "weaknesses" of the theory of evolution. His reference to the "weaknesses" of evolution is creationist code talk. Board vice chairman David Bradley also avowed that he would not support the teaching of ID in science classes. However, Mr. Bradley also appears to know the terminology: "I do want to make sure the next group of textbooks includes the strengths and weaknesses of evolution." (*Dallas Morning News*, August 23, 2007)

Dr. McLeroy and Mr. Bradley are overlooking the fact that evolutionary theory has survived one hundred fifty years of scientific scrutiny for its "strengths and weaknesses," whereas ID could not survive even six weeks of legal and scientific scrutiny in a Pennsylvania courtroom. Stephen Meyer and William Dembski, who, according to Dr. McLeroy's lecture, are seeking a "fair hearing" for ID, were given a chance to present their best pro-ID arguments in that very courtroom. They just didn't show up. (See Barbara Forrest, "The 'Vise Strategy' Undone: *Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District*," at <http://www.csicop.org/intelligentdesignwatch/kitzmiller.html> [9].)

Dr. McLeroy's 2005 ID church lecture is much more instructive than his more recent comments to the *Dallas Morning News*. In this lecture, he declared himself to be in the "big tent" of intelligent design: "Whether you're a progressive creationist, recent creationist, young earth, old earth, it's all in the tent of intelligent design. . . . And that's one thing that I really enjoyed about our group is that we've put that all in the big tent, we're all working together." (This "big tent" is the political alliance that ID leader Phillip Johnson has tried to forge among the creationists with whom Dr. McLeroy has enjoyed working.)

McLeroy then professed his wonderment that during the 2003 textbook adoption process, "all the arguments" by "all the creationist intelligent design people" speaking before the Board of Education (among whom he specifically named "our good friend Walter Bradley," a Texas resident and long-time Discovery Institute fellow) were not taken seriously by "my fellow board members who . . . were not impressed by any of this. . . . Amazing." McLeroy was further amazed that "all the arguments are dismissed like this here is a subversive, secret attempt to force religion into science." Now, why on *earth* would anyone draw *that* conclusion? Amazing.

The incident now involving Ms. Comer exemplifies perfectly the reason my co-author Paul R. Gross and I felt that our book, *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*, had to be written. (<http://www.creationismstrojanhorse.com> [10]) By forcing Ms. Comer to resign, the TEA seems to have confirmed our contention that the ID creationist movement -- a religious movement with absolutely no

standing in the scientific world -- is being advanced by means of power politics. In December 2005, Judge John E. Jones III validated our contention that ID is creationism, thus a religious belief, when he ruled in *Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District* http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf [11]) that the teaching of ID in public school science classes is unconstitutional. Judge Jones recognized that ID has nothing whatsoever to do with science; its proponents are merely using public education -- the public education of *other people's children* -- as the vehicle for their plan to undermine the teaching of evolution.

The one thing that should not be forgotten in this episode is that Ms. Comer herself has been injured, and Texas children have lost a valuable advocate for quality science education. I regret deeply that the TEA chose to use my work as an excuse to hurt Ms. Comer. Even more, I am incensed by it. However, what happened to her may be just the tip of the iceberg. This country has reached a sorry state of affairs when one of the largest, most prominent departments of education in the country fires a public servant for doing her job. But while I regret that the information I related in my presentation in Austin and in my book has been confirmed in such a sad way, my co-author and I have every intention of continuing our efforts as scholars and citizens to inform the American people about the threat that the intelligent design creationist movement continues to pose to public education and to the constitutional separation of church and state.

Barbara Forrest
December 5, 2007

[Anti-Evolution](#) [12]

[2007](#) [13]

[Texas](#) [14]

[+ read](#) [3]

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[13] <https://ncse.com/news/2007>

[14] <https://ncse.com/news/texas>