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10.18.2007

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Speaking on the Senate floor on October 17, 2007, Senator David Vitter (R-Louisiana) withdrew a controversial \$100,000 earmark that he previously added to the appropriations bill for the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. The earmark was to the Louisiana Family Forum, a religious right group with a long history of promoting creationism and attacking evolution education in the state, including backing a "strengths and weaknesses" policy in Ouachita Parish.

The earmark was the topic of instant controversy after the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (September 22, 2007) [reported](#) [4] on it, explaining, "The money in the earmark will pay for a report suggesting 'improvements' in science education in Louisiana, the development and distribution of educational materials and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Ouachita Parish School Board's 2006 policy that opened the door to biblically inspired teachings in science classes."

Critics were quick to note the inappropriateness of devoting public funds to efforts to undermine the integrity of science education and to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. A coalition of concerned organizations, including Americans United for Separation of Church and State and NCSE, circulated a [letter](#) [5] protesting the Vitter earmark to the members of the Senate; People for the American Way circulated its own [letter](#) [6]. NCSE also urged its members to lobby their senators.

The objections of the critics were apparently heeded, even though on the floor of the Senate, Vitter insisted that the money was not aimed at promoting creationism and described the concerns as "hysterics." According to the Congressional Record, Vitter [said](#) [7] (PDF):

The project, which would develop a plan to promote better science-based education in Ouachita Parish by the Louisiana Family Forum, has raised concerns among some that its intention was to mandate and push creationism within the public schools. That is clearly not

and never was the intent of the project, nor would it have been its effect. However, to avoid more hysterics, I would like to move the \$100,000 recommended for this project by the subcommittee when the bill goes to conference committee to another Louisiana priority project funded in this bill.

Senators Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania), the floor managers of the appropriations bill, accepted Vitter's proposal and agreed to move the funds to a different project in Louisiana when the bill is in its conference committee.

Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, applauding the removal of the earmark in a [press release](#) [8] dated October 18, 2007, commented, "If Sen. Vitter's aim was to improve science education in Louisiana, I have to wonder why he did not direct these funds to a scientific group or a museum." He added, "Boosting science education is an odd task for a religious group."

"Senator Vitter's defense of the earmark is obviously disingenuous, given the Louisiana Family Forum's record of fighting tooth and nail against evolution education," commented NCSE's executive director Eugenie C. Scott. "But I'm glad to see that, with the removal of his earmark, public funds are not going to be misused to miseducate the children of Louisiana about the science of evolution."

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