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A day after the legislative session began in Louisiana, the sponsor of Senate Bill 561 was in the news, denying that the so-called academic freedom bill would pave the way for creationism to be taught in the state's public schools. According to the Baton Rouge *Advocate* (April 1, 2008), state senator Ben Nevers (D-District 12) [said](#) [4], "I believe that students should be exposed to both sides of scientific data and allow them to make their own decisions," adding, "I think the bill perfectly explains that it deals with any scientific subject matter which is taught in our public school system." The [bill](#) [5] (PDF) in fact specifically identifies "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning" as controversial subjects, and calls on state and local education administrators to "endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies."

Nevers acknowledged that he introduced SB 561 at the behest of the Louisiana Family Forum; the bill itself is based on a [policy](#) [6] adopted, with the LFF's support, by the Ouachita Parish School Board in 2006. A religious right group with a long history of promoting creationism and attacking evolution education in the state, the LFF claims that it "promotes 'Teaching the Controversy' when it comes to matters such as biological [*sic*] evolution"; yet it [recommends](#) [7] (PDF) a variety of young-earth and "intelligent design" websites, including the Institute for Creation Research, the Foundation for Thought and Ethics, and Kent Hovind's Creation Science Evangelism, on its own website. Unsurprisingly, then, the executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Reverend Barry Lynn, told the *Advocate*, "This is all about God in biology class."

Writing in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* (March 20, 2008), the columnist James Gill [observed](#) [8] that SB 561 is based on "the spurious premise that evolution is a matter of serious scientific debate and that both sides are entitled to a hearing. A lot of people have fallen for that line, including Gov. Bobby Jindal,

although, of course, scientists, save a few stray zealots, regard the evidence for evolution as overwhelming." He also drew attention to a particularly problematic provision of SB 561 directing administrators not to "censor or suppress in any way any writing, document, record, or other content of any material" referring to the topics covered by the bill, which he described as "a license for crackpots." Gill concluded, "The bill is of no conceivable benefit to anyone but Christian proselytizers. Besides, its genesis is plainly sectarian."

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