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A recent article in the *Fort Worth Weekly* (August 3, 2008) [warns](#) [4] of the impending battle over the place of evolution in Texas's state science standards. "The basic fight is expected to be over what kids are taught about evolution -- which takes up only about three days of teaching in a 180-day school year," Laurie Barker James writes. "But scientists and teachers argue there are much bigger things at stake: the intimidation of teachers and the possible beginning of biblical beliefs being taught as science in Texas public schools."

Steven Schafersman, the president of [Texas Citizens for Science](#) [5], told the *Weekly* that the current educational climate "intimidates [science] teachers," forcing them "to avoid or minimize" the topic of evolution. James added, "The fact that none of the other science teachers interviewed for this article wanted their names used would seem to back up his allegation of fear in the teaching ranks. All but [Kevin] Fisher said they believe that any statement with their names on it could come back to them in the form of a pink slip."

Naturally, the case of Chris Comer, who was forced to resign from her position as director of science at the Texas Education Agency in October 2007 over her forwarding a note announcing a talk by Barbara Forrest, was discussed. As NCSE previously [reported](#) [6], she is now suing the TEA, seeking, among other things, a declaratory judgment that its policy of requiring its employees to be "neutral" with respect to creationism violates the Establishment Clause. The TEA is asking for the lawsuit to be dismissed.

The article proceeds to explain the political dynamics of the Texas state board of education. Dan Quinn, the communications director of the [Texas Freedom Network](#) [7], told James that Texans have "elected a

board with a bloc of ideologues who care more about promoting their own personal agendas than educating Texas kids," with seven of the fifteen members of the board -- one short of a majority -- identified as allied with the religious right. Among them is the chair of the board, Don McLeroy, whose hostility to evolution education is [notorious](#) [8].

Reacting to a claim that those seven members of the board are only seeking accuracy, Schafersman explained, "The intent of the SBOE creationists is to ask for misrepresentation of science, not for accuracy." They plan, he said, to "damage evolution instruction by trying to get the new science standards to include [lessons on] alleged but false 'weaknesses' of evolution, in order to weaken evolution content, confuse students, and make them think science is less accurate and reliable about biological origins than it really is."

What's next? "Experts are currently composing drafts, according to the TEA's schedule, and the SBOE will have another 'discussion' about the science curricula in November. [A spokesperson for the TEA] said the public can comment now, or at any of the meetings between November 2008 and March 2009, as well as via the agency's web site." But, James added, "Science teachers and their advocates are urging interested Texans to write directly to TEA Commissioner Scott or to their local SBOE members now -- and not to wait until the official proposal is released in January."

The TFN's Dan Quinn emphasized the importance of the issue, saying, "Right now, what the SBOE does will determine whether the next generation of Texas public school students get a 19th-century education in their 21st-century classroom ... The adoption of the science curriculum will determine whether students will be prepared to succeed in college and jobs of the future, or whether their education is subordinated to the views and beliefs of a fringe group of SBOE members." And James added, "What happens here will also ripple through the textbooks of other states."

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