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[House Bill 656](#) [4], introduced in the Missouri House of Representatives on February 10, 2009, and not yet referred to a committee, is the latest antievolution "academic freedom" bill. The bill would, if enacted, call on state and local education administrators to "endeavor to create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about controversial issues, including such subjects as the teaching of biological and chemical evolution," and to "endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies." "Toward this end," the bill continues, "teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of theories of biological and chemical evolution."

A predecessor, [HB 2554](#) [5] from the 2008 legislative session, attempted to immunize itself from the accusation of unconstitutionality by saying, "This section only protects the teaching of scientific information and this section shall not be construed to promote any religious or nonreligious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs, or promote discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion." However, HB 656 is interestingly specific, saying, "This section only protects the teaching of scientific information and this section shall not be construed to promote philosophical naturalism or biblical theology, promote natural cause or intelligent cause, promote undirected change or purposeful design, promote atheistic or theistic belief, promote

discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or ideas, or promote discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion. Scientific information includes physical evidence and logical inferences based upon evidence."

The chief sponsor of HB 656 is Robert Wayne Cooper (R-District 155), joined by Mike Sutherland (R-District 99), Ed Emery (R-District 126), Therese Sander (R-District 22), Brian Nieves (R-District 98), and Stanley Cox (R-District 118). Cooper was the sponsor of numerous failed antievolution bills in the past. In 2008, he introduced the similar HB 2554. In 2006, he introduced [HB 1266](#) [6], which if enacted would have required that "If a theory or hypothesis of biological origins is taught, a critical analysis of such theory or hypothesis shall be taught in a substantive amount." In 2004, he introduced two bills, [HB 911](#) [7] and [HB 1722](#) [8], that called for equal time for "intelligent design" in Missouri's public schools. HB 911 moreover contained idiosyncratic definitions of various scientific and philosophical terms as well as the draconian provision, "Willful neglect of any elementary or secondary school superintendent, principal, or teacher to observe and carry out the requirements of this section shall be cause for termination of his or her contract."

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