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02.22.2013

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Would a proposed amendment to the Virginia state constitution have undermined the teaching of evolution in the state's public schools? [Senate Joint Resolution 287](#) [4] would have revised a portion of the state constitution that concerns freedom of religion. Among the revisions was the addition of a provision "that no student in public schools shall be compelled to perform or participate in academic assignments or educational presentations that violate his religious beliefs."

The summary of SJR 287 as introduced explains, "The proposed amendment is based on a provision in the Missouri Constitution approved by the Missouri voters August 7, 2012." The effect of the Missouri amendment on evolution education there is worrisome, as NCSE previously [reported](#) [5]. Before it was adopted, *The New York Times* (August 6, 2012) [expressed](#) [6] editorial concern that the amendment "would allow students who believe in creationism ... to opt out of assignments on evolution."

Similarly, in Virginia, Americans United for Separation of Church and State [worried](#) [7] on its blog (January 30, 2013) that SJR 287 was aimed at allowing creationist students "to drop out of biology class if an assignment or presentation deals with evolution," and state senator Janet D. Howell (D-District 32) likewise [told](#) [8] the *Washington Post* (January 29, 2013) that SJR 287 "makes it so a child can say, 'I don't want to study evolution because I don't believe in it.'"

William M. Stanley Jr. (R-District 20), a cosponsor of the resolution, told the *Post*, "They should still be able to recite Darwin's theory," explaining that creationist students would not be permitted to ignore evolution in class, although they would not be penalized for rejecting it. He was not, however, quoted as

explaining why it would not violate the provision in question to compel a student to study evolution if he or she claimed that it violated their religious beliefs.

After SJR 287 was introduced, it was referred to the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, which modified it slightly and reported it back to the Senate on January 29, 2013. On February 5, 2013, at Stanley's request, the Senate recommitted it back to the committee, where it is effectively dead because February 5 was the deadline for each house to complete work on its own legislation. The legislature is scheduled to adjourn sine die on February 23, 2013.

The resolution was sponsored by Stanley and Charles W. Carrico Sr. (R-District 40), with Mark L. Cole (R-District 88) serving as its patron in the House. Even if the resolution had passed the Senate, it would still have had further hurdles to jump: as the *Post* explained, "To amend the state constitution, the resolution would have to pass the General Assembly twice, with a general election for the House of Delegates between the two legislative sessions, and then receive approval from voters in a referendum."

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