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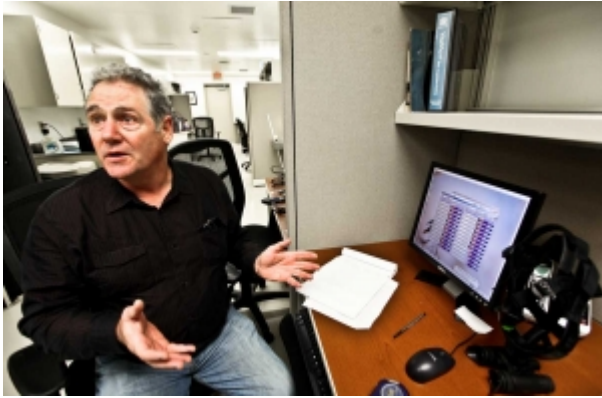
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## [A Texas Mystery Solved: The Case of Vincent Cassone](#) [8]

With [the news that an expert review panel unanimously approved Pearson's \*Biology\* textbook and rejected creationist criticisms of it](#) [9], there was one last nagging mystery in the Texas textbook saga. I expected the book to be approved as written, having [said it would take five minutes for reviewers to see that the complaints against the book were bogus](#) [10]. And I understood why Arturo De Lozanne and Ron Wetherington, both Texas scientists long active in promoting the integrity of science education in their state, were appointed to the review panel. Since they had already [publicly dismissed the bogus complaints](#) [11], I wasn't surprised by their vote on the panel.



But what about Vincent Cassone, the reviewer appointed by Texas state board of education chairwoman Barbara Cargill? Cargill is a leader of the board's creationist wing, and in the past has often used her power to undercut evolution in textbooks. Why did she appoint a scientist from Kentucky rather than Texas? (Granted, he was once biology department chairman at Texas A&M.) Why would she appoint a reviewer who has so vigorously opposed creationism, having debated various creationists and publicly declared that the evidence for evolution is stronger than that for gravity?

[Myomancy](#) [12] having failed me, I tried the next best thing and wrote to Cassone directly. Here's our email exchange (edited for flow and clarity, but not changing any of his answers).

#### **NCSE: How did you come to be nominated for this review committee?**

Cassone: Ironically, I was nominated by Walter Bradley, and Barbara Cargill texted me about it. I was on the faculty at Texas A&M for 20 years until 2008. I was department head of biology from 2003 to 2008 until I moved to Kentucky, so I know a little about the landscape. Also, I was the lead reviewer for biology texts in 2003 and dealt with these issues then (same as it ever was).

**Funny that Cargill was consulting Bradley. [A professor of mechanical engineering at Baylor, Bradley is a fellow with the Discovery Institute's creationist wing and a co-author of one of the early works of the "intelligent design" movement in the 1980s.] I assume he was precluded because his doctorate isn't in a relevant field (as the board required of the reviewers). Any idea why he suggested you? Surely he and Cargill couldn't have expected you'd agree with the complaints.**

I don't know about any relationship between Cargill and Bradley. My non-scientific discussions with them have been cordial and even friendly. They both seem to be very nice people. I know Walter is devoutly religious. He believes his recovery from leukemia has a flavor of the divine. When we debated about Intelligent Design at Blinn College some years ago, we were professional and friendly (although I crushed him). When we discussed mediating the review, he indicated that he always thought I was fair.

#### **Had you been tracking the Texas textbook fight at all before you were contacted?**

See above. Plus, I am always interested in Texas politics. It's better than the Simpsons. Too bad Molly Ivins has passed away.

#### **What was your reaction upon reading through Trotter's list of objections?**

I was bemused. Once I realized it was Ide Trotter, I understood. I have known Dr. Trotter for several years. I debated several intelligent design proponents during my time at A&M, including Michael Behe

([you have the podcast](#) [10]), Walter Bradley, and William Dembski. We often agreed to disagree, but we remain cordial.

I should say I did have to clarify one point concerning similarity in the complexity of proteins. These do not HAVE to denote common ancestry; they could be convergent, but when I saw the entire context of the quote, I did not see any factual error.

### **Are there any other thoughts or remarks you'd like to share?**

There was a time when scientists felt that they were above the fray and should not engage with the creationists. In fact, part of the Discovery Institute's [Wedge Strategy](#) [13] is to get on the stage with real scientists so that they can claim credibility. It is beyond that now. Scientists who are capable of doing so need to directly counter the claims of these individuals. They are not interested in science, and they are not interested in education. They are interested in political power. They are dangerous.

Best regards and keep fighting the good fight.

Vinnie

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Image from [a profile of Cassone in a report on Cassone's research](#) [14].

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