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Antievolution law proposed in Florida

OAKLAND, CA March 2

It's not a hurricane or even a tropical storm. But a small knot of ignorance is twisting through the Florida state senate.

Late last week, Stephen R. Wise (R-District 5) filed Senate Bill 2396, which if passed, would require "[a] thorough presentation and critical analysis of the scientific theory of evolution." Like other "academic freedom" bills that aim to smuggle creationism back into the classroom, this bill would let educators teach the supposed scientific controversy swirling around evolution.

"There is no controversy among scientists", says Dr. Genie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE). "Evolution is a proven science, backed by a mountain of evidence. Naturally, scientists continue to test and expand the theory, to debate the patterns and processes of evolution. But telling students that evolution is scientifically shaky is just flat wrong."

Senator Wise hasn't been shy about his intentions—before he introduced the bill, he admitted his goal was to promote the teaching of "intelligent design" in Florida public schools. "If you're going to teach evolution, then you have to teach the other side so you can have critical thinking," said Wise in an interview with the Jacksonville Times-Union. But when the bill was finally filed, all mention of intelligent design was excised.

Florida has recently endured a bout of anti-evolution legislation. House Bill 1483 (filed in early 2008) supposedly protected the right of teachers to "objectively present scientific information relevant to the

full range of scientific views regarding biological and chemical evolution". But Florida newspapers (not to mention the state department of education) could not substantiate any claims of persecution. The House bill—and its Senate counterpart, SB 2692—did not become law because the two chambers couldn't agree on compromise wording before the end of the legislative session.

Said the Tampa Tribune at the time, "The session will be remembered for what wasn't done to compromise the quality of education in Florida."

Will Senator Wise's bill suffer a similar fate in the land of Disney? The grassroots pro-science group [Florida Citizens for Science](#) [4] hopes so. "Florida's schools and the state as a whole are floundering in financial turmoil, and citizens are demanding our lawmakers focus their attention on this crisis. There is no appetite for embarrassing our state yet again."

"Florida has bigger fish to fry," says NCSE Project Director Josh Rosenau. "Florida already has science standards in place; they've got a board of education; and they have teachers that know what they're doing. It's crazy for legislators to micromanage the classroom."

CONTACT: Robert Luhn, Director of Communications, NCSE, 510-601-7203, luhn@ncseweb.org [5]

Website: ncseweb.org [6]

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