

## KANSAS SCHOOLS GETTING BUM RAP ON EVOLUTION

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During the 1999 evolution/creationism debate, one national scientist proclaimed that when there was a science vacancy at K-State, prospective candidates should decline to come to Kansas since it was obvious that the citizenry of Kansas did not support science. Another suggested that universities in the other 49 states should test students entering from Kansas since it was obvious that Kansas students were not getting a good education.

So what is the rate of creationist belief among Kansas high school biology teachers? I conducted a survey made before the 1999 debate using the same questions used in surveys of teachers in several other states. The percent of Kansas biology teachers who believed creationism had a valid scientific basis was lower (25%), not higher, than the other states surveyed (Ohio was 38% and South Dakota was 39%). When it came to giving equal time for creationism, Kansas teachers remained the lowest at 25% while teachers in other states surveyed higher on equivalent questions: Georgia (30%), Illinois (30%), Kentucky (69%), Louisiana (29%), and U.S.-wide surveys range from 39%–45%.

The assertion that Kansas citizens do not support science is also groundless. There are many criteria that could be used to assess science in Kansas, and I have yet to see any that place Kansas in the bottom half of the states. Indeed, on a per capita basis, Kansas is very near the top on many measures, from listings in *Who's Who in Science* to the fact that you can't drive around Kansas very far without running into signs noting the home of an astronaut or Nobel Laureate. With aeronautical research in Wichita and pharmaceutical testing in the Kansas City area, and with a wide array of pure and applied research at KU, K-State and the regional universities, Kansas is a leader in science. We have nothing to apologize for.

The few national science figures who cast aspersions on Kansas could not pass peer review if their statements were submitted to a science journal. Their pronouncements constitute nothing more than emotional tantrums. Yet, because they come from science figures, they have the potential of hurting our recruitment of new scientists and the morale of science teachers in Kansas.

Meanwhile, some science supporters testified before the KSBE that science-related companies will leave the state! Really? And where will Boeing and Bayer go? Perhaps to Cobb County xx where textbook stickers were rampant, or Pennsylvania or Arkansas or Louisiana where various forms of creationism were mandated locally or state-wide? Or to any of the other states where teacher support for creationism is higher? While I do not agree on creationism with Dr. Calvert who heads the ID Network, he was completely correct in calling predictions of an industrial flight from Kansas "silly."

As the evolution/creationism debate again becomes our focus of attention, it is important for Kansas scientists to hold our colleagues to the facts. Kansas is a progressive state with some of the best science teaching and science research in the nation and this debate is not going to change that fact.