

Group urges no politics, religion in science curriculum

By **GARY SCHARRER**
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AUSTIN — A coalition of Texas scientists warned the State Board of Education Tuesday not to inject politics or religion into new science guidelines for public schools.

The group worries that social conservatives on the 15-member board will insist that public schools teach the "weaknesses of evolution." The board plans to adopt new science curriculum standards next year.

"We are here to support and promote strong, clear, modern science education in Texas schools," said David Hillis, professor of integrative biology at the University of Texas at Austin. "Texas public schools should be preparing our kids to succeed in the 21st century, not promoting political and ideological agendas that are hostile to a sound science education."

But it's important for Texas biology teachers to explain the strengths and weaknesses of various theories, including biology, said the board's chairman, Dr. Don McLeroy, R-Bryan.

A panel of experts recently recommended the "strengths and weaknesses" provision remain in

astronomy and chemistry but be removed from the updated science curriculum.

"We will probably put it back in," McLeroy said. "If it's viable for astronomy and chemistry, it's good enough for biology."

Disputing the scientists, McLeroy, a dentist, said there are a number of weaknesses in the theory of evolution, citing fossil records as an example.

"It's strong evidence for (evolution), but I also think it's some of the strongest evidence against it," he said.

Scientists contend the "strengths and weaknesses" provision is simply an excuse to expose students to "supernatural and fringe explanations" instead of sticking to traditional scientific principles.

"We should teach students 21st-century science, not some watered-down version with phony arguments that nonscientists disingenuously call 'weaknesses,'" said Sahotra Sarkar, a professor of integrative biology at UT. "Calling 'intelligent design' arguments a weakness of evolution is like calling alchemy a weakness of chemistry, or astrology a weakness of astronomy."

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