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[Senate Bill 320](#) [4] (document), prefiled in the Oklahoma Senate and scheduled for a first reading on February 2, 2009, is apparently the first antievolution bill of 2009. Entitled the "Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act," SB 320 would, if enacted, require state and local educational authorities to "assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies" and permit teachers to "help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught." The only topics specifically mentioned as controversial are "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning."

Unsurprisingly, SB 320 is a further instance of the "academic freedom" strategy for undermining the teaching of evolution; as NCSE's Glenn Branch and Eugenie C. Scott recently [wrote](#) [5] in their article "The Latest Face of Creationism," published in the January 2009 issue of *Scientific American*, "'Academic freedom' was the creationist catchphrase of choice in 2008: the Louisiana Science Education Act was in fact born as the Louisiana Academic Freedom Act, and bills invoking the idea were introduced in Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Missouri and South Carolina ..." Of these, only the Louisiana bill was passed and enacted, over protests from the scientific, educational, and civil liberties communities.

The sponsor of the Oklahoma bill is Randy Brogdon (R-District 34), who was a cosponsor in 2006 of [House Concurrent Resolution 1034](#) [6]. If enacted, HCR 1034 would have encouraged "the State Board of Education and local boards of education to revise the recommended academic curriculum content standards in science to ensure that, upon graduation, all students can accomplish the following: 1. Use of

[sic] the scientific method to critically evaluate scientific theories including, but not limited to, the theory of evolution; and 2. Use relevant scientific data to assess the validity of those theories and to formulate arguments for and against those theories." HCR 1034 died in committee in May 2006.

Oklahomans concerned about SB 320 are encouraged to get in touch with [Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education](#) [7], a non-profit educational organization that promotes the education of the public about the methods and values of science and advocates excellence in the science curriculum. As OESE explains on its website, "The formation of OESE was prompted by the attempts in the Oklahoma State Textbook Committee in 1999 to diminish the teaching of evolution by the introduction of creationist textbook disclaimers to be inserted into any textbook used in public schools that discussed evolution. There have been bills introduced almost every year since 1999 for legislation that would allow teaching creationism in science courses; OESE has opposed all such attempts."

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 52nd Legislature (2009)

SENATE BILL 320 By: Brogdon

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to schools; creating the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act; providing short title; stating Legislative findings; directing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators to create certain environment within schools; permitting teachers to help students understand certain information about scientific theories; disallowing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators from prohibiting teachers from helping students understand certain information about scientific theories; providing for evaluation of students based on understanding of course materials; prohibiting penalizing of students for holding certain position on scientific theories; prohibiting certain construction; directing State Department of Education to provide certain notification; directing superintendents to disseminate certain information; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 27-101 of Title 70, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

- A. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act".
- B. The Oklahoma Legislature finds that an important purpose of science education is to inform students about scientific evidence and to help students develop critical thinking skills they need in order to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed citizens. The Legislature further finds that the teaching of some scientific subjects, such as biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning, can cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the expectations concerning how they should present information on such subjects.
- C. The State Board of Education, district boards of education, district superintendents and administrators, and public school principals and administrators shall endeavor to create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond appropriately and respectfully to

differences of opinion about controversial issues. Such educational authorities in this state shall also endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

D. Neither the State Board of Education, nor any district board of education, district superintendent or administrator, or public school principal or administrator shall prohibit any teacher in a school district in this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

E. Students may be evaluated based upon their understanding of course materials, but no student in any public school or institution shall be penalized in any way because the student may subscribe to a particular position on scientific theories.

F. This act only protects the teaching of scientific information, and this act shall not be construed to promote any religious or non-religious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or non-beliefs, or promote discrimination for or against religion or non-religion. On the contrary, the intent is to create an environment in which both the teacher and students can openly and objectively discuss the facts and observations of science, and the assumptions that underlie their interpretation.

G. By no later than the start of the 2009-2010 school year, the State Department Education shall notify all district superintendents of the provisions of this act. Each superintendent shall then disseminate to all employees within the district a copy of the provisions of this act.

SECTION 2. This act shall become effective July 1, 2009.

SECTION 3. It being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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[4] http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/2009-10bills/SB/sb320_int.rtf

[5] <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-latest-face-of-creationism>

[6] <http://ncseweb.org/news/2006/02/fourth-antievolution-bill-oklahoma-00891>

[7] <http://www.oklascience.org/>

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