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[House Bill 25](#) [4], introduced in the Mississippi House of Representatives by Representative Gary Chism (R-District 37) on January 6, 2009, and referred to two committees, Education and Judiciary A, would, if enacted, mandate the state board of education to require every textbook that discusses evolution to include a disclaimer describing evolution as "a controversial theory." In full, the proposed disclaimer reads:

The word "theory" has many meanings, including: systematically organized knowledge; abstract reasoning; a speculative idea or plan; or a systematic statement of principles. Scientific theories are based on both observations of the natural world and assumptions about the natural world. They are always subject to change in view of new and confirmed observations.

This textbook discusses evolution, a controversial theory some scientists present as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things. No one was present when life first appeared on earth. Therefore, any statement about life's origins should be considered a theory.

Evolution refers to the unproven belief that random, undirected forces produced living things. There are many topics with unanswered questions about the origin of life which are not mentioned in your textbook, including: the sudden appearance of the major groups of

animals in the fossil record (known as the Cambrian Explosion); the lack of new major groups of other living things appearing in the fossil record; the lack of transitional forms of major groups of plants and animals in the fossil record; and the complete and complex set of instructions for building a living body possessed by all living things.

Study hard and keep an open mind.

At present, the only state to require a textbook disclaimer about evolution is Alabama, which is currently using a [disclaimer](#) [5] adopted in 2005. The proposed Mississippi disclaimer is evidently a hybrid of two previous [versions](#) [6] of the Alabama disclaimer: its first paragraph is modeled on the first paragraph of the second version (adopted in 2001), while much of the remainder is modeled on the first version (adopted in 1995).

In a 1996 lecture at Auburn University, later published in the *Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science*, Richard Dawkins offered a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the first version of the Alabama disclaimer, [criticizing](#) [7] it as "a study in ignorance and dishonesty." In 2000, when the state of Oklahoma was considering adopting the first version of the Alabama disclaimer, Kenneth R. Miller agreed, [concluding](#) [8], "By any standard, this disclaimer fails even an undemanding test of scientific literacy."

A textbook disclaimer was at the center of the [Selman v. Cobb County](#) [9] case. Less prolix and less committal than the Alabama disclaimers, the Cobb County disclaimer still insisted that evolution is "a theory, not a fact." In 2005, the disclaimer was ruled to be unconstitutional and the disclaimers were removed from the textbooks; on appeal, the verdict was vacated and the case was remanded to the trial court. A settlement was reached, in which the Cobb County School District agreed not to make any disclaimers about evolution either orally or in writing.

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