

Richard W. Riley

**Talking Points on the Teaching of Evolution and
Creationism in public schools**

I personally believe that evolution should be taught in America's public schools.

If I was the Governor of Kansas I would have opposed the decision by the Kansas Board of Education to essentially eliminate "evolution" from the state's science curriculum.

The Governor of Kansas Bill Graves, who happens to be Republican, said that the vote by the Kansas Board of Education was "a terrible, tragic embarrassing solution to a problem that did not exist."

Developing curriculum is a state and local issue unless it violates the U.S. Constitution. I am a strong supporter of state and local control of education. At the same time, you can't dance around the Constitution.

In 1987 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that teaching creationism advances a "particular religious viewpoint." In that case, *Edwards v. Aguillard* the Court ruled that a Louisiana law was unconstitutional because it prohibited the teaching of evolution unless creationist science was taught as well.

I believe that the Kansas decision will eventually be seen as legally suspect.

We live in a great age of science and now is not the time to be short-changing America's young people when it comes to getting ready for the 21st century. Evolution is one of the basic principles of science. You really can't teach biology without teaching evolution.

The United States has been at the forefront of scientific discovery in this century and we shouldn't be going backwards.

The United States now has two great telescopes up in space right now -- the Hubble and the Chandra telescopes. They are sending us wonderful pictures of our universe.

Those pictures really do give us something to think about -- you have to be humble when you look at the unfolding majesty and complexity of our universe.

I'm like a lot of people who see God's hand in the grandeur of our universe. I'm a practicing Methodist and I don't think that science and religion are incompatible.

Education
Question and Answers
August 12, 1999

Q: What is the Administration's position on the Kansas Board of Education's decision not to teach evolution in schools?

A: While the federal government has a significant role to play in ensuring that all our children have access to the high-quality education they deserve, curriculum decisions are appropriately made on a state and local level.

Q: Has the President asked the Department of Education to examine the issue of teaching evolution?

A: The Department is prohibited by law from mandating curriculum. The Department of Education Organization Act says that "No provision of a program administered by the Secretary or by any other officer of the Department shall be construed to authorize the Secretary or any such officer to exercise any direction supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school or school system..." (Section 103 B 20 US Code 3403 (b)).

Q: But doesn't the Administration comment regularly on what children should learn in school, e.g. reading and math?

A: The federal government plays a critical leadership role in encouraging schools to set high standards for all students – including core academic areas such as reading, math and science – and to support state and local efforts to ensure that students reach high standards. These efforts help ensure that schools focus on results and that all students have the academic preparation needed for success. However, the federal government is not involved in determining the specific content of those standards or in deciding exactly how or what students should be taught. For example, the Administration has encouraged states and school districts to help all children learn to read well and independently by the end of the third grade, but it is up to them to choose the appropriate curriculum and instructional strategy to reach that goal.

Q: Does the President support the inclusion of evolution in state science standards?

A: Again, the President believes, as he did when he was a governor, that states and localities have primary responsibility for education and must have the flexibility to decide what to teach and how to teach it. He also feels strongly, however, that our children need an educational environment that promotes scientific and intellectual inquiry. The National Academy of Sciences, in their report *Science*

and Creationism, has laid out the compelling scientific evidence supporting the theory of evolution, and the judgment of these experts deserves great weight.

Q: Do the Administration's "Guidelines for Religious Freedom" address this issue?

A: The issue decided by the Kansas Board is one of science curriculum, not one of religious freedom or expression.

Kansas State Board of Education -- Evolution in Science Standards
Office of Science and Technology Policy Q's and A's
August 31, 1999

Q: What do you think of the Kansas State Board of Education's decision to delete any reference to evolution from their statewide science standards?

A: While the federal government has a significant role to play in ensuring access to a high quality education for all students, curriculum decisions are appropriately left to states and localities.

Having said that, however, we do believe that the Kansas decision to ignore evolution in science education is terribly flawed, and if allowed to stand will have devastating effects on the education of a generation of Kansans. In addition to serious questions about the constitutionality of teaching creationism, which has no scientific basis, the omission of the fundamental, scientifically sound organizing principle in biology – with clear implications for the teaching of geology, astronomy, and physics as well – would be a drastic setback in the nation's quest to ensure the scientific literacy of our children and future workforce. The decision flies in the face of highly regarded, widely accepted science standards published by both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, which treat the theory of evolution as a unifying concept for all levels of elementary and secondary education.

Virtually every basic scientific lesson taught in our elementary and secondary schools would be turned on its head. Universally accepted understanding of fundamental scientific issues, such as the age of the Earth, the speed of light, and the appropriate interpretation of fossils – just to name a few – would be badly skewed. To align with the notion of creationism, for example, we would have to agree that the Earth is less than 10,000 years old, rather than the 4.5 billion years old figure accepted by modern scientists.

Q: Aren't teachers in Kansas free to teach content – like the theory of evolution – that isn't specified in state standards?

A: Yes. However, the state content standards form the basis for statewide tests. These assessments are used for accreditation and other high-stakes accountability measures that encourage teachers to focus exclusively on the content areas specified in the standards, virtually assuring that evolution will not be mentioned in Kansas classrooms.