

Other Viewpoints

Stifle challenge to evolution soon

Cue the Kansas evolution wars again. Or maybe not so much. A group called Citizens for Objective Public Education has gone to court to challenge the science standards developed by Kansas, 25 other states and the National Research Council. The critics say that the standards promote evolution and climate change as key scientific concepts and that they advance atheistic explanations at the expense of Christian teachings. "The state's job is simply to say to students, 'How life arises continues to be a scientific mystery, and there are competing ideas about it,'" John Calvert, a Lake Quivira lawyer, told the Associated Press. Calvert, a key figure in past Kansas evolution fights, is wrong again. The state's job is most assuredly not to dumb down science education. Evolution and climate change are well-established, mainstream scientific views. Fortunately, the state Board of Education is taking the right side this time. Members of the elected board say they will stand by the standards. In other phases of Kansas' long-running tug of war over science education, state school board members were the ones questioning evolution. Some legal experts predict the latest lawsuit won't hold up in court. Let's hope not. Kansas students deserve an education in modern science. They don't need to revisit a controversy settled decades ago.

— *The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press*

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roberts.senate.gov/public/
- U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.
Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/
- U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov
- State Rep. Ward Cassidy**, (120th District) State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 151-S, Topeka, Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7616 ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov
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AND NOW A WORD FROM THE PARTY OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY...



Courses at risk for watering down

Faculty at Kansas regents universities and community colleges have met annually to coordinate courses and maintain rigor and quality. But last October, Kansas professors were ordered to provide total course transfer.

And this Sept. 27, Kansas professors again met to water down more college coursework. An elementary microbiology course taken for an associate degree program for nursing home attendants may be forced to be accepted as "equivalent" to the solid microbiology course in a pre-medical program.

Responsibility for the integrity and rigor of university curriculum is supposed to rest with faculty. But these "core competency" meetings have now become the mechanism to coerce universities into accepting anemic courses. At Kansas State last year, faculty were directly instructed to reduce the competencies required in each class to the bare minimum. This brings the syllabus for our courses down to the lowest common denominator.

In biology we were directed to distill down the minimal competencies for microbiology, including labs. We wanted to specify that the laboratory work had to be genuine labwork that developed hands-on skills, not virtual simulations. So we were told: "just list the competencies." So we approved national competencies already developed by the American Society of Microbiology. Fortunately, these national competencies specify directly supervised, that is face-to-face, laboratory work. This also corresponds with the growing number of university programs refuse transfer



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

credited faculty are important. But the Board of Regents reduced the minimal credentials for teaching college courses, from a master's degree with 18 graduate hours in the subject taught, to just a bachelor's degree with 24 undergraduate credit hours. That is substantially less than what is required to be a high school teacher.

Yes, you can teach an academic college course at Kansas tech schools and community colleges with less education than is required to teach the same topic in high school. And it gets worse. Some Kansas technical colleges now offer three-credit academic courses in just two weekends. This absurd practice is closer to diploma mills where you simply buy your diploma. Last year, 500 faculty met at a cost of \$200 each. Kansas paid \$100,000 to water down the curriculum. This Sept. 27, Kansas faculty again descend on Kansas State under pressure to continue reducing the minimum competencies of Kansas college courses. This erodes the value of a Kansas degree, even for those students who take a rigorous program.

A decade ago, the Kansas Legislature moved community colleges and tech schools from the State Department of Education to the Board of Regents so there would be oversight of these issues. If the Board of Regents is unwilling to coordinate these programs and oversee academic quality, then it may be time to return them to the State Board of Education. John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that

It's time for an intervention

The American public has lost patience with Washington. The question is, now what?

Congress is unable to do its job. It displays neither competence nor responsibility. It lurches – reeling from crisis to crisis, each one self-manufactured in an effort to postpone the reckoning from some earlier crisis. It shut the government down over a temporary budget. Now it's threatening the financial credibility of the U.S. government and the security and safety of the American people. Three years of last-minute spending decisions have culminated in a standoff with no actual negotiations. Too many members of Congress reject the notion that accommodation and time-honored procedures allow them to fulfill their responsibilities to the American people. They use their legislative skill to engage in brinkmanship rather than address the country's fundamental problems. Economic growth? Creating jobs? Putting the federal budget on a sustainable path? Don't look to Congress. They're too busy coming up with the next short-term tactic to confront the other side. Every day they dither, they keep the government from addressing the nation's real problems.

Even worse, they've managed to raise real questions in this country and abroad about whether our system of government can work. Are we saddled with a national legislature paralyzed by unending conflict? Are we capable of tackling our major problems? We are on the road to a government that cannot plan, a country shackled by perpetual uncertainty, and a loss of faith in our institutions both at home and abroad. We do not have to continue down that road, but we do have to confront a core problem.

Other Opinions

• Lee Hamilton Center on Congress

The political center in Congress has weakened to the point of ineffectiveness, if not near-irrelevance.

That's fine with some people in Washington, who are comfortable with gridlock and don't think its consequences will be dire. Our government's inability to deal with problems, they argue, is good – a government that's able to act, they believe, creates more problems than it solves.

Likewise, some people acknowledge polarization as a problem, but blame it on an electorate that prefers a divided government, split between the parties. All I can say is that divided government in the past – think Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill – didn't keep Congress from creatively addressing national challenges. Divided government is not easy, but it is not unusual and it can work.

Politicians don't deserve all the blame. Voters share responsibility: more people have to turn out to vote. The more people who vote, the better the chances to strengthen the political center – that is, moderates and pragmatists. That's because low turnout brings out the most ideologically intense voters, who in turn reward the most polarizing candidates. A Congress more representative of the American

people rests on expanding efforts to convince people to vote, and beating back the barriers to voting.

The second solution lies with members of Congress. Contemplating a government shut-down, a Kentucky congressman recently explained his stance by saying, "All that really matters is what my district wants." This is not an uncommon view, but it's a distressingly limited one. Our system depends on members who believe it's also their responsibility to lead and inform voters, who are willing to weigh the national interest as well as parochial concerns and who have confidence in our system to resolve political differences.

In other words, we need members of Congress devoted to making the system work. We need men and women in office who understand that when the voters give us a divided government, they have no choice but to accept the distribution of power and work with it, regardless of what they wish were the case. We need legislators who realize that those on the other side feel just as passionately and deserve their respect, and who are committed to finding a solution to our problems.

We change laws in our democracy and solve our most difficult issues in this country not by bringing government to a halt, but by fighting out the issues before the voters in an election. At the end of the day, we have to move the country forward – and we need to elect members of Congress who are willing and able to do that.

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

