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Darwin Foes Add Warming to Targets

By **LESLIE KAUFMAN**

Critics of the teaching of evolution in the nation's classrooms are gaining ground in some states by linking the issue to [global warming](#), arguing that dissenting views on both scientific subjects should be taught in public schools.

In Kentucky, [a bill](#) recently introduced in the Legislature would encourage teachers to discuss "the advantages and disadvantages of scientific theories," including "evolution, the origins of life, global warming and human cloning."

The bill, which has yet to be voted on, is patterned on even more aggressive efforts in other states to fuse such issues. In Louisiana, [a law](#) passed in 2008 says the state board of education may assist teachers in promoting "critical thinking" on all of those subjects.

Last year, the Texas Board of Education adopted language requiring that teachers present all sides of the evidence on evolution and global warming.

Oklahoma introduced a bill with similar goals in 2009, although it was not enacted.

The linkage of evolution and global warming is partly a legal strategy: courts have found that singling out evolution for criticism in public schools is a violation of the separation of church and state. By insisting that global warming also be debated, deniers of evolution can argue that they are simply championing academic freedom in general.

Yet they are also capitalizing on rising public resistance in some quarters to accepting the science of global warming, particularly among political conservatives who oppose efforts to rein in emissions of greenhouse gases.

In South Dakota, [a resolution](#) calling for the "balanced teaching of global warming in public

schools” passed the Legislature this week.

“Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant,” the resolution said, “but rather a highly beneficial ingredient for all plant life.”

The measure made no mention of evolution, but opponents of efforts to dilute the teaching of evolution noted that the language was similar to that of bills in other states that had included both. The vote split almost entirely along partisan lines in both houses, with Republican voting for it and Democrats voting against.

For mainstream scientists, there is no credible challenge to evolutionary theory. They oppose the teaching of alternative views like intelligent design, the proposition that life is so complex that it must be the design of an intelligent being. And there is wide agreement among scientists that global warming is occurring and that human activities are probably driving it. Yet many conservative evangelical Christians assert that both are examples of scientists’ overstepping their bounds.

John G. West, a senior fellow with the [Discovery Institute](#) in Seattle, a group that advocates intelligent design and has led the campaign for teaching critiques of evolution in the schools, said that the institute was not specifically promoting opposition to accepted science on climate change. Still, Mr. West said, he is sympathetic to that cause.

“There is a lot of similar dogmatism on this issue,” he said, “with scientists being persecuted for findings that are not in keeping with the orthodoxy. We think analyzing and evaluating scientific evidence is a good thing, whether that is about global warming or evolution.”

Lawrence M. Krauss, a physicist who directs the [Origins Initiative](#) at [Arizona State University](#) and has spoken against efforts to water down the teaching of evolution to school boards in Texas and Ohio, described the move toward climate-change skepticism as a predictable offshoot of creationism.

“Wherever there is a battle over evolution now,” he said, “there is a secondary battle to diminish other hot-button issues like Big Bang and, increasingly, climate change. It is all about casting doubt on the veracity of science — to say it is just one view of the world, just another story, no better or more valid than fundamentalism.”

Not all evangelical Christians reject the notion of climate change, of course. There is a budding green evangelical movement in the country driven partly by a belief that because God created the earth, humans are obligated to care for it.

Yet there is little doubt that the skepticism about global warming resonates more strongly among conservatives, and Christian conservatives in particular. A [survey](#) published in October by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that white evangelical Protestants were among those least likely to believe that there was “solid evidence” that the Earth was warming because of human activity.

Only 23 percent of those surveyed accepted that idea, compared with 36 percent of the American population as a whole.

The Rev. Jim Ball, senior director for climate programs at the [Evangelical Environmental Network](#), a group with members who accept the science of global warming, said that many of the deniers feel that “it is hubris to think that human beings could disrupt something that God created.”

“This group already feels like scientists are attacking their faith and calling them idiots,” he said, “so they are likely to be skeptical” about global warming.

[State Representative Tim Moore](#), a Republican who introduced the bill in the Kentucky Legislature, said he was motivated not by religion but by what he saw as a distortion of scientific knowledge.

“Our kids are being presented theories as though they are facts,” he said. “And with global warming especially, there has become a politically correct viewpoint among educational elites that is very different from sound science.”

The evolution curriculum has developed far more than instruction on climate change. It is almost universally required in biology classes, while the science of global warming, a newer topic, is taught more sporadically, depending on the interest of teachers and school planners.

But interest in making climate change a standard part of school curriculum is growing. Under [President Obama](#), for example, the Climate Education Interagency Working Group, which represents more than a dozen federal agencies, is making a strong push toward “climate literacy” for teachers and students.

State Representative [Don Kopp](#), a Republican who was the main sponsor of the South Dakota [resolution](#), said he acted in part because “An Inconvenient Truth,” a documentary film on global warming starring [Al Gore](#), was being shown in some public schools without a counterweight.

The legal incentive to pair global warming with evolution in curriculum battles stems in part from a [2005 ruling](#) by a United States District Court judge in Atlanta that the Cobb County Board of Education, which had placed stickers on certain [textbooks](#) encouraging students to view evolution as only a theory, had violated First Amendment strictures on the separation of church and state.

Although the sticker was not overtly religious, the judge said, its use was unconstitutional because evolution alone was the target, which indicated that it was a religious issue.

After that, said Joshua Rosenau, a project director for the [National Center for Science Education](#), he began noticing that attacks on climate change science were being packaged with criticism of evolution in curriculum initiatives.

He fears that even a few state-level victories could have an effect on what gets taught across the nation.

[James D. Marston](#), director of the Texas regional office of the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), said he worried that, given Texas' size and centralized approval process, its decision on textbooks could have an outsize influence on how publishers prepare science content for the national market.

"If a textbook does not give enough deference to critics of climate change — or does not say that there is real scientific debate, when in fact there is little to none — they will have a basis for turning it down," Mr. Marston said of the Texas board. "And that is scary for what our children will learn everywhere."