



# *The North Texas*

# Skeptic

Volume 20

December 2006

Number 12

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## A heckuva job

by John Blanton

All right, we've done it now.

In 2003 creationists from the Discovery Institute came to the Texas science text book adoption hearings in Austin to comment on the treatment of evolution in Texas texts. Unfortunately for the creationists, some real scientists showed up, as well, and the creationists left empty-handed.<sup>1</sup>

The Discovery Institute creationists had assistance at the hearings from (surprise) creationists on the State Board of Education (SBOE). These were people we elected to serve the interests of education in Texas. All I can say is Texas voters did a heckuva job at the polls.

At the 2003 meeting the prominent supporters for creationism were board chair Geraldine Miller, Terri Leo and Don McLeroy. One significant board member who stood up for science at the hearing was Dan Montgomery. This November came new elections for the board, and politically conservative forces have swung the pendulum to the right.



Mike Selby and Wesley Elsberry at the November Board Meeting

James Leininger, a deep-pockets conservative from San Antonio, spent millions of dollars in the 2006 Texas elections targeting Democratic candidates and also Republicans who were not far enough right. Republican Dan Montgomery caught some of this spatter and was knocked out of the race.

Wesley Elsberry is a speaker for the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), and he attended the NTS board meeting and social dinner in November

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### December Program

We are NOT having a December Program.

**We're Having A Party!**

Saturday 9 December 2006  
2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

### NTS Annual Year End Party

See the accompanying article for the details.



### NTS Annual Board Meeting and Elections

The NTS is run by those who show up.

Saturday 13 January 2007  
2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Check the **NTS Hotline** for more information at 214-335-9248.

## North Texas Skeptics

### Officers

President . . . . . John Brandt  
 Vice President . . . . . Pat Reeder  
 Secretary . . . . . Mike Selby  
 Treasurer . . . . . Mark Meyer

### Staff

Newsletter Editor . . . . . Keith Blanton  
 Webmaster . . . . . John Blanton  
 Meetings and Social Director . . . . . Mike Selby

### Board of Directors

Laura Ainsworth, Daniel Barnett, Virginia Barnett,  
 Erling Beck, John Blanton, John Brandt, Prasad Golla,  
 Elizabeth Hittson, Jack Hittson, Claudia Meek,  
 and Mike Selby

**Directors Emeritus** Tony Dousette, Ron Hastings,  
 Mark Meyer, John Thomas, Joe Voelkerling, and Mel  
 Zemek

### Scientific and Technical Advisors:

Joe Barnhart, Professor of Philosophy  
 Raymond A. Eve, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, UT  
 Arlington  
 Timothy N. Gorski, M.D., Physician  
 Ronnie J. Hastings, Ph.D., Science Teacher  
 Anthony P. Picchioni, Ph.D., Licensed Professional  
 Counselor  
 James Rusk, Director, Russell Planetarium  
 Lakshman S. Tamil, Ph.D., Engineer  
 John Thomas, Attorney

The North Texas Skeptics is a tax-exempt  
 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All  
 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend  
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or  
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings  
 on topics of current interest or social events.

Our newsletter, *The North Texas Skeptic*, is  
 published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics,  
 P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794.

Permission to reprint: Articles in *The North Texas  
 Skeptic* may be reprinted without further permission,  
 provided that *The Skeptic* is credited as the source, the  
 mailing address above is listed, and a copy of the  
 publication containing the reprint is sent to the Editor.  
 Opinions expressed in *The Skeptic* are those of the  
 individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the  
 views of The North Texas Skeptics. Contents and logo  
 © 2006 by North Texas Skeptics.

to discuss the state of creationism in Texas education and to give us the bad news. He observed that with the November elections the SBOE is now wall-to-wall creationists. All I can say is we're doing a heckuva job, Skeptics. □

### References

- 1 See the story in December 2003 issue of The North Texas Skeptic.  
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2003/2003december/december2003.htm#chainsaw>

## NTS year end party

**W**hat are the Darwin awards?

Well, they have a little bit to do with natural selection. It works like this:

Suppose a person is so famously stupid that he blunders his way right out of the gene pool. To give an example, an Iraqi civilian reported watching as an insurgent dropped a mortar round down the gun's tube, then looked down the barrel to see why it didn't fire. Provided this brilliant specimen as yet had no descendents, then he exited stage right from the pool. Meaning, of course, that his stupid gene didn't get passed on.

Wrong, again.

The daily news continues to remind us the stupid gene is still out there. Maybe you know somebody who has it but hasn't expressed it yet. Not biologically, but in action. I have more examples.

A newspaper clipping from a few years back tells of a jury award. Seems the survivors of a man received a multi-million-dollar civil award from the accidental death of the poor unfortunate. He was standing on a platform that was being moved, and he came in contact with a high voltage line.

Wait, there's more. His is not the Darwin award. That came a few hours later. While investigators were attempting to re-enact the tragedy, two more people were killed. Theirs is the Darwin award. Get the picture?

Anyhow, I will be recounting the most recent Darwin awards at the NTS December meeting and not-quite-winter party. Please bring your own nominations. Not in person, of course, because this kind of thing can be dangerous to standers-by. Just bring the stories. Will there be a competition? Do creationists travel in packs?

Wait, there's more!

There will be food. Nothing nutritious, of course. This is a *party*. Of course, you have to *bring* the food. And drinks, of course. No alcohol, and nothing that will stain the nice carpet at the Center for Community Cooperation.

Also, I will bring some creationist videos. Bring your own to share. There will be a DVD player, but no video tape player.

Bring your skeptical books to share. Mike Selby will have some nice offerings out of the NTS skeptical library, so think about swapping out something with the library.

**When: 2 p.m., Saturday, 9 December**

**Where: 2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas**

**All welcome. Bring outsiders. Even children. Extra terrestrials, too.**

See the NTS Web site for a map:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/whatsnew.htm>




---

## Web News

by John Blanton

*The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.*

The Discovery Institute is a Seattle-based think tank, and its Center for Science and Culture (CSC) is the main driving force behind the "Intelligent Design" version of creationism. CSC has a lot going for it in the way of college-educated staff and associates (fellows), most of them with real Ph.D. degrees or the equivalent from real institutes of learning.

Some of the CSC fellows are professors at reputable colleges and universities, and these include Michael Behe at Lehigh University and Scott Minnich at the University of Idaho. On the other hand, many of the fellows, though they possess Ph.D. degrees, do not actively work in their field. While some may be college professors, their work is not related to their field of study, and they do not publish in scientific journals in their field. William Dembski's degrees include a Ph.D. in mathematics and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Chicago, but he is currently Professor of Science and Theology at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

For all this, the activities and publications that the CSC fellows have little to show for Intelligent Design as science. What is shown is a great amount of energy expended in getting out the CSC's message that there is legitimate scientific controversy concerning the facts of evolution. CSC's message contains almost zero scientific evidence that supports Intelligent Design.

Here from CSC's *Evolution News* site, the story seems to be that real science is called *Darwinism*, and legitimate discourse is called *rhetoric* when it does not align with CSC's view. The author is Casey Luskin. Luskin "is co-founder of the Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness (IDEA) Center ([ideacenter.org](http://ideacenter.org)), a non-profit helping students to investigate evolution by starting 'IDEA Clubs' on college and high school campuses across the country."

### Associated Press Regurgitates Darwinist Rhetoric

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-12-03.htm#rhetoric>

[http://www.evolutionnews.org/2006/11/associated\\_press\\_regurgitates.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2006/11/associated_press_regurgitates.html)

The Associated Press has a story on the Kansas Science Standards which repeats the rhetoric of Kansas Darwinists. It states, "While Kansas public schools are likely to get their fifth set of science standards in eight years, the officials who want to ditch the anti-evolution ones now in place aren't planning to act immediately." But the present standards are not "anti-evolution." The present standards teach more about evolution than do most statewide science standards and include extensive sections discussing the evidence both for and against evolution.

Well, that's just the point. The position of CSC is anti-evolution as demonstrated by the vast body of their public offerings, and the "present standards" referenced in this piece do involve a dumbing down of evolution. Specifically:

Science studies natural phenomena by formulating explanations that can be tested against the natural world. Some scientific concepts and theories (e. g., blood transfusion, human sexuality, nervous system role in consciousness, cosmological and biological evolution, etc.) may differ from the teachings of a student's religious community or their cultural beliefs. Compelling student belief is inconsistent with the goal of education. Nothing in science or in any other field of knowledge shall be taught dogmatically. <sup>1</sup>

Apparently having a teacher stand up in front of a classroom and telling students "This is true" amounts to teaching

dogmatically in the view of the Kansas science standards and in the view of the CSC. Luskin continues:

The article also wrongly asserts that the standards have a “tilt toward intelligent design,” and the article mentions intelligent design 7 times. This focus on intelligent design is misleading: as we’ve repeatedly discussed, the Kansas Science Standards state they “do not include Intelligent Design” and the standards “neither mandate nor prohibit” teaching about ID. Why were these quotes left out of this article?

When the science standards do point out that cosmology and biological evolution may conflict with religion and then indicate schools should tread lightly here, these standards do align with the stated view of the Intelligent Design philosophy. Luskin expends a lot of energy in his post picking apart the Associated Press wording. Energy the CSC does not seem to have available to demonstrate any scientific validity for Intelligent Design.

The article also claims that the new standards change “a definition of science that doesn’t specifically limit science to the search for natural explanations of phenomena.” As discussed here, the standards simply reset the definition of science back to a definition similar to how most states define science, including how Kansas did prior to 2001, and this was not an attempt to claim the supernatural is a part of science.

The Kansas science standards do back away from the limitation to natural explanations, and it is unfortunate if most state standards allow for the supernatural or that Kansas science standards previously did in the past.

The article also claims that aspects of the standard which challenge common descent based upon paleontology and molecular biology are “intelligent design arguments, defying mainstream science.” Firstly, it should be noted that the standards present both evidence for and against Neo-Darwinism and do not unilaterally criticize common ancestry. For example, they require students to learn that, “The presence of the same materials and processes of heredity (DNA, replication, transcription, translation, etc.) is used as evidence for the common ancestry of modern organisms.” Of course the Darwinists and Associated Press omit mention of such statements in order to allege the standards are “anti-evolution.”

If the Associated Press writer confused a challenge to common descent with “Intelligent Design,” it could be because Intelligent Design proponents with the CSC on occasion do challenge common descent. For example, Ray Bohlin is a CSC fellow and supposedly a spokesman for Intelligent Design. At the Texas Faith Network conference in Dallas on 3 November 2003 Bohlin addressed a large room full of people and stated

that common descent was true for all life forms, except humans. You can imagine the confusion of all in attendance.

But what about the aspects of the standards that do critique Darwin? As discussed here, many aspects of the Kansas Science Standards which critique Darwin, including those dealing with common descent and micro vs. macroevolution, have their roots in mainstream scientific publications. For example, W. F. Doolittle (a Neo-Darwinist) writes “[m]olecular phylogenists will have failed to find the ‘true tree,’ not because their methods are inadequate or because they have chosen the wrong genes, but because the history of life cannot properly be represented as a tree.” The article is simply repeating Darwinist rhetoric and ignoring the fact that criticisms of Neo-Darwinism can be found in mainstream science.

If people confuse Intelligent Design with traditional creationism, it’s not due to a successful effort by the new creationists to distinguish themselves. Luskin, in an apparent attempt to demonstrate how Intelligent Design differs, illustrates with a tactic of the traditional creationists. It’s the out-of-context quote.

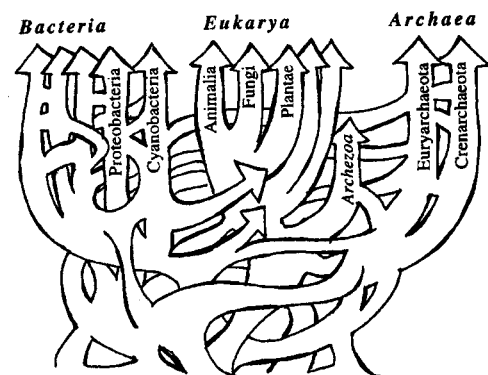


Figure 1 from Doolittle

“A reticulated tree, or net, which might more appropriately represent life’s history. Martin (16), in a review covering many of the same topics as this one, has presented some striking colored representations of such patterns.”

Doolittle did write “[m]olecular phylogenists will have failed to find the ‘true tree,’ ...” He did so in an article indirectly cited. Doolittle’s remarks are from the abstract of a paper he published in *Science*. Here is the complete abstract with Luskin’s quote highlighted:

From comparative analyses of the nucleotide sequences of genes encoding ribosomal RNAs and several proteins, molecular phylogeneticists have

## Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.  
© 2006. Free, non-commercial reuse permitted



constructed a “universal tree of life,” taking it as the basis for a “natural” hierarchical classification of all living things. Although confidence in some of the tree’s early branches has recently been shaken, new approaches could still resolve many methodological uncertainties. More challenging is evidence that most archaeal and bacterial genomes (and the inferred ancestral eukaryotic nuclear genome) contain genes from multiple sources. If “chimerism” or “lateral gene transfer” cannot be dismissed as trivial in extent or limited to special categories of genes, then no hierarchical universal classification can be taken as natural. **Molecular phylogeneticists will have failed to find the “true tree,” not because their methods are inadequate or because they have chosen the wrong genes, but because the history of life cannot properly be represented as a tree.** However, taxonomies based on molecular sequences will remain indispensable, and understanding of the evolutionary process will ultimately be enriched, not impoverished.<sup>2</sup>

Doolittle says in the abstract and elaborates further in the body that scientists need to realize that cross-pollination between species has occurred, and the “tree of life” can be better called the “web of life.” Figure 1 from Doolittle shows this graphically. Does all this contradict a naturalistic explanation of evolution? Does all this contradict any part of “descent with modification” or “evolution through natural selection?” Does Luskin make all of this clear in his post?

Despite the fact that intelligent design was irrelevant to the article, the article does have a pretty good definition of intelligent design: “Intelligent design says an intelligent cause is the best way to explain some features of the universe that are complex and well-ordered.” If by “complex and well-ordered,” the reporter means “complex and specified,” then I’d have to say this is one of the best definitions of intelligent design in the media. Nonetheless, given its repetition of Darwinist rhetoric, the article also provides an **excellent example of the media bias** on this issue. [emphasis added]

Posted by Casey Luskin on November 27, 2006 9:01 AM | Permalink

Again, Luskin helps us to understand “media bias” by sprinkling examples throughout this post.

As with most blog posts, Luskin’s text contains hyperlinks to additional material. These links are necessarily suppressed in the printed copy, so if you are reading this on paper, you will need to go to the on-line copy to follow the links.

### References

- 1 From the KANSAS Science Education Standards Approved by the Kansas State Board of Education on November 8, 2005 and February 14, 2006, page 9. On-line at <http://www3.ksde.org/outcomes/sciencestd.pdf>
- 2 W. Ford Doolittle, “Phylogenetic Classification and the Universal Tree,” *Science* Vol. 284, p. 2124, 25 June 1999.

### Future Meeting Dates

January 13 2007	July 14 2007
February 17 2007	August 11 2007
March 17 2007	September 8 2007
April 21 2007	October 13 2007
May 19 2007	November 10 2007
June 16 2007	December 8 2007

North Texas Skeptics  
P.O. Box 111794  
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

**FIRST CLASS**

Address Correction Requested

**Application for Membership**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail address \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Special expertise and/or interests \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Membership agreement:

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (972) 306-3187

**Indicate your choice:**

**Member:** A voting member and newsletter recipient. Family privileges included. Annual dues \$35.00

**Newsletter recipient:** No membership privileges. Annual subscription rate \$15.00

**Receive a \$5 discount** on either of the two newsletter subscription levels above by choosing to receive your newsletter by e-mail only.

**Introduce a friend** to *The North Texas Skeptic*: Let us send a **FREE** three-month gift subscription of *The Skeptic* to this individual (or institution).

**Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation** to The North Texas Skeptics in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

**Bill me:** Please bill me for the choices I have made above.

*www.ntskeptics.org*