



# *The North Texas*

# Skeptic

Volume 20

February 2006

Number 2

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## NTS election of officers

The North Texas Skeptics (the organization) is run by the people who show up for the January meeting. And then some.

On January 14 those members gathered at the Center for Nonprofit Management and elected a new **board of directors**. John Blanton phoned in his vote from a parking lot in Tucson, Arizona. Breaking out of a well-worn rut, these members picked two new faces. Erling Beck and Claudia Meek have stepped up to the plate to help take some of the heat off the other board members of long standing. Here's the new list:

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

Board members selected the following to carry out the routine tasks of the organization:

### NTS Officers

- ❖ John Brandt, President
- ❖ Pat Reeder, Vice President
- ❖ Mike Selby, Secretary
- ❖ Mark Meyer, *Treasurer*

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### Saturday 11 February 2006

2 p.m.  
Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

### Icons of Evolution

John Brandt will present a review of the creationist video.

We previously looked at the DVD in the January 2006 *North Texas Skeptic*. Jonathan Wells' musings on what's wrong with evolution are the topic of his book of the same title. This month, NTS president John Brandt will present his take.

### February Board of Directors/Social Meeting

Saturday — 25 February  
7 p.m. at:  
Good Eats  
6950 Greenville Ave.  
Dallas

# 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 Voelkering, and Mel  
 Zemek

## Scientific and Technical Advisors:

Joe Barnhart, Professor of Philosophy  
 David E. Dunn, Ph.D., Geologist  
 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

## NTS Staff

- ❖ Keith Blanton, Newsletter Editor
- ❖ John Blanton, Webmaster
- ❖ Mike Selby, Meetings and Social Director

Check the Web page on our Web site for full details and for e-mail  
 addresses of some of these.

## NTS stock is up

**O**K, The North Texas Skeptics does not issue stocks. But if we did,  
 our stock would be doing just fine about now.

For the year 2005 the NTS showed a profit. Our income exceeded  
 our expenses by over \$106. In case you haven't been following the  
 news, that's more money than General Motors made all of last year.

But wait. Isn't the NTS supposed to be a nonprofit? Well, we still  
 are, and that's the reason we are not paying dividends to our share hold-  
 ers (you).

Our principal expense last year was, as always, printing. We paid  
 out over \$650 to print our newsletter and over \$400 for postage, the next  
 highest expense category. Postage and printing expenses are kept down  
 by the large number of members and subscribers who obtain their news-  
 letter by e-mail. Give it a try.

Membership fees made up our largest source of income, followed by  
 donations. Can you imagine anybody contributing hard cash to an orga-  
 nization like ours, only to see it spent on printing, postage, and Internet  
 fees.

Speaking of Internet, referral fees from Amazon earned us over \$230,  
 which covered about two thirds of the cost of maintaining our Web site.  
 We get fees from Amazon whenever buyers use links on our site to make  
 purchases from Amazon. Hint, hint. If you are going to buy from Ama-  
 zon, check with our site first. We maintain links to all kinds of books  
 and other merchandise of interest to skeptics, including electronics,  
 photo equipment, and even baby clothing.

If there's something you like, and you don't see a link on our Web  
 site, let us know, and we will start listing it. Send an e-mail to the Web  
 master (skeptic@ntskeptics.org). Often we can have an updated Web  
 page ready for you to use the same day.

As the NTS enters its twentieth year of operation, we want to thank  
 all of our loyal supporters for continuing to make all of this possible.  
 Come out to the meetings when you can. The once a month NTS social  
 dinner is particularly painless. Check the newsletter and our Web site  
 for schedules.

## 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.*

In December federal judge John E. Jones simultaneously ruled against the Dover, PA, school board's plan to introduce creationism in their science curriculum and chastised board members for playing fast and loose with the law. Immediately following the judge's decision the Internet lit up, and the embers continue to glow over a month later.

### Waterloo in Dover

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-12-22.htm#waterloo>

<http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/archives/13054>

Just like Napoleon, the creationists met headlong with reality. Who didn't see this coming?

Steve Verdon wrote this:

Just not the kind of Waterloo Intelligent Design (ID) Proponent William Dembski was hoping for. It appears that the judge in the Dover case has ruled rather broadly and this bodes ill for ID in general. This in turn, in my view, bodes ill for creationists of all stripes.

The problem for creationists in general is that ID represents one of the last stages of evolution of creationist "theory" before it goes extinct. ID is creationism with all the references to God removed and tarted up in sophisticated language of mathematics and biology to make it look more like science than any previous incarnation of creationism. When you look at the history of science education and evolutionary theory in the U.S. the path for the creationists has not been a very good one. They have gone from a position of complete dominance and legal superiority (teaching evolution and evolutionary theory was illegal in some states) to the being slowly replaced by evolutionary theory, to being declared illegal, and now we have this sterile and stripped down version of creatinism that can't even mention God.

One of the problems for ID advocates is that the judge asked the following question in his decision (you can find the decision [here](http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220_kitzmiller_342.pdf)—  
[http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220\\_kitzmiller\\_342.pdf](http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220_kitzmiller_342.pdf)

— it is a pretty good sized pdf so I'd recommend downloading it first).

We must now ascertain whether the ID Policy "in fact conveys a message of endorsement or disapproval" of religion, with the reasonable, objective observer being the hypothetical construct to consider this issue.

The answer can't be anything other than, "Yes, ID conveys a message of endorsement or disapproval of religion." The reason is simple. If one were to look at ID writings on the topic they would eventually come across William Dembski's Law of Conservation of Information, as well as Dembski's paper on Searching Large Spaces. These two things point to the impossibility of certain biological features arising naturally. This leaves only a supernatural explanation, which leaves the only explanation being some sort of deity. Of course, Dembski did not testify at the trial and his arguments were not part of the trial. However, the judge did look at other evidence that also lead to the same conclusion. Specifically the judge traced, in detail, the history of creationism and ID as I did above (briefly).

Judge Jones noted "the Dover policy is misleading, inconsistent, questionable in regards to honesty, and confusing to students about the nature of science. In other words, far from teaching a legitimate controversy in a scientific field and allowing for academic freedom the policy has precisely the opposite effect."

Verdon concluded the judge's decision debunked "the 'academic freedom' argument, the 'teach the controversy argument', that 'ID is science' argument..."

### The empire strikes back:

The headline read:

#### **Dover Intelligent Design Decision Criticized as a Futile Attempt to Censor Science Education**

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-12-22.htm#discovery>

<http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/12-20-2005/0004237364&EDATE=>

The Discovery Institute struck immediately, issuing a press release on the same day the Dover decision was announced. The conservative, Republican judge suddenly turned out to be a reactionary, legislating from the bench, and seeking to ignite his career with this case:

SEATTLE, Dec. 20 /PRNewswire/ — “The Dover decision is an attempt by an activist federal judge to stop the spread of a scientific idea and even to prevent criticism of Darwinian evolution through government-imposed censorship rather than open debate, and it won’t work,” said Dr. John West, Associate Director of the Center for Science and Culture at Discovery Institute, the nation’s leading think tank researching the scientific theory known as intelligent design. “He has conflated Discovery Institute’s position with that of the Dover school board, and he totally misrepresents intelligent design and the motivations of the scientists who research it.”

“A legal ruling can’t change the fact that there is digital code in DNA, it can’t remove the molecular machines from the cell, nor change the fine tuning of the laws of physics,” added West “The empirical evidence for design, the facts of biology and nature, can’t be changed by legal decree.” In his decision, Judge John Jones ruled that the Dover, Pennsylvania school district violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment by requiring a statement to be read to students notifying them about intelligent design. Reaching well beyond the immediate legal questions before him, Judge Jones offered wide-ranging and sometimes angry comments denouncing intelligent design and praising Darwinian evolution.

“Judge Jones found that the Dover board violated the Establishment Clause because it acted from religious motives. That should have been the end to the case,” said West. “Instead, Judge Jones got on his soapbox to offer his own views of science, religion, and evolution. He makes it clear that he wants his place in history as the judge who issued a definitive decision about intelligent design. This is an activist judge who has delusions of grandeur.” “Anyone who thinks a court ruling is going to kill off interest in intelligent design is living in another world,” continued West. “Americans don’t like to be told there is some idea that they aren’t permitted to learn about. It used to be said that banning a book in Boston guaranteed it would be a bestseller. Banning intelligent design in Dover will likely only fan interest in the theory.”

“In the larger debate over intelligent design, this decision will be of minor significance,” added Discovery Institute attorney Casey Luskin. “As we’ve repeatedly stressed, the ultimate validity of intelligent design will be determined not by the courts but by the scientific evidence pointing to design.”

Luskin pointed out that the ruling only applies to the federal district in which it was handed down. It has no legal effect anywhere else. The decision is also unlikely to be appealed, since the recently elected Dover school board members campaigned on their opposition to the

policy. “The plans of the lawyers on both sides of this case to turn this into a landmark ruling have been preempted by the voters,” he said.

“Discovery Institute continues to oppose efforts to mandate teaching about the theory of intelligent design in public schools,” emphasized West. “But the Institute strongly supports the freedom of teachers to discuss intelligent design in an objective manner on a voluntary basis. We also think students should learn about both the scientific strengths and weaknesses of Darwin’s theory of evolution.”

Drawing on recent discoveries in physics, biochemistry and related disciplines, the scientific theory of intelligent design proposes that some features of the natural world are best explained as the product of an intelligent cause rather than an undirected process such as natural selection. Proponents include scientists at numerous universities and science organizations around the world.

SOURCE Discovery Institute  
Web Site: <http://www.discovery.org>

Forgetting to mention, we note, that board members sought to introduce religion into science classes in a public school. Then they later denied this, and subsequently lied about it in court.

## Schools Nationwide Study Impact of Evolution Ruling

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-12-22.htm#impact>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/22/science/sciencespecial2/22evolution.html>

**By LAURIE GOODSTEIN Published: December 22, 2005**

In Muscatine, Iowa, the school board took up the issue of teaching Intelligent Design “as a challenge to evolution.”

Board members disagree about whether they will be swayed by a sweeping court decision on intelligent design released on Tuesday in Pennsylvania. A federal judge there ruled intelligent design “a religious alternative masquerading as a scientific theory” that must not be taught in a public school science class.

“I don’t think that a judge in one state is going to be able to tell everybody in all other states what to do,” said Paul Brooks, a school board member and retired princi-

pal in Muscatine who favors teaching intelligent design. “So I don’t get too excited about what he said.”

The board’s vice president, Ann Hart, demurred. “This determination in Pennsylvania will help the cause,” Ms. Hart said, “for those of us who think intelligent design should not be taught in public school science classes because of separation of church and state.”

Educators and legislators in Muscatine and other communities that are considering intelligent design said they were learning about the results of the trial involving the school board in Dover, Pa., and had not read the decision.

## Ever play this game?

Nobody wants to get left holding the hot potato.

### Intelligent Design – The Hot Potato

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-01-27.htm#potato>

[http://usconservatives.about.com/b/a/2006\\_01\\_25.htm](http://usconservatives.about.com/b/a/2006_01_25.htm)

### January 25, 2006 Conservative Politics: U.S. Blog Archives January 22, 2006

#### Amy Hess, Your Guide to Conservative Politics: U.S..

Public schools have dropped Intelligent Design Theory more than once. Or had it knocked from their hands. While there are a number of parents, school administrations and teachers willing to expose students to Darwinism’s weak spots, there are also a number of evolutionists and secularists who abhor such efforts. The result has been a steady stream of lawsuits and local battles.

Hess notes that “Intelligent Design was kicked out of a school district in California – less than a month after an I.D. loss in a Pennsylvania U.S. District court. The recent defeats have discouraged I.D. proponents in other parts of the country, but the war is nowhere near over.”

#### Barred From One Philosophy Classroom

I.D. was booted from California’s El Tajon school district just last week. This raised my eyebrows at first, since I.D. opponents are often bellow, “Put it in a philosophy class, but keep it out of the science lab!” However, the class at Frazier Mountain High wasn’t really a proper I.D. overview anyway. The course, Philosophy of Design, apparently turned into more of a class on

Biblical Creationism, which is different than I.D. in many respects.

As in Dover, parents sued after the school introduced the course that lent more than a little support for a particular religious view.

#### Not a Religion

The absurd thing is that Intelligent Design theory itself has nothing to do with religion. It does not depend on religion or refer to religion or hope to define its Intelligent Designer. It simply argues that certain biological machines and processes are too interdependent and complex to have formed by evolution.

Hess’ remarks to the contrary, an interested observer might wonder: if promotion of religion is not the goal, then why are all these religious people pushing so hard for it?

Hess concluded:

“We believe evolution should be taught as a scientific theory that is open to critical scrutiny, not as a sacred dogma that can’t be questioned,” said Casey Luskin, Program Officer for Public Policy & Legal Affairs at the Discovery Institute.

Science standards in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kansas, New Mexico, and Minnesota currently require that students learn about some scientific controversies relating to evolution. South Carolina is right now considering the same approach to the issue.

Speaking of South Carolina...

### S.C. governor OK with intelligent design

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/2006-02-02.htm#sanford>

<http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/view.php?StoryID=20060131-011620-1110r>

COLUMBIA, S.C., Jan. 31 (UPI) — South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford says he believes intelligent design should be taught in his state’s public school classrooms.

In a Sunday appearance on a WIS-TV program, Sanford said there’s nothing wrong with presenting students with alternatives to the theory of evolution.

“I think that it’s just ... that there are real chinks in the armor of evolution being the only way we came about,” Sanford said.

Intelligent design posits life on earth is too complex to be explained by evolutionary theory alone.

“The idea of there being a, you know, a little mud hole and two mosquitoes get together and the next thing you know you have a human being is completely at odds with, you know, one of the laws of thermodynamics.”

I only wish I could tell you “You heard it here first.”




---

## What's New

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.bobpark.org/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

### Cloned lies: *Science* will retract celebrated Korean paper.

(WN 30 Dec 05) Two weeks ago, a paper in the journal *Science* was reported to contain fabrications (WN 16 Dec 05). An investigating panel at Seoul National University, where the research was conducted, now concludes that Woo Suk Hwang, who became an international celebrity and a national hero in South Korea, fabricated the entire paper. However, according to a story in *Science* last week, Hwang still claims his conclusions are valid. That's sadly reminiscent of the Jan Hendrik Schoen scandal at Bell Labs three years ago (WN 27 Sep 02).

### Pious lies: not every fraudulent research paper is retracted.

(WN 30 Dec 05) We could not help but compare the proper handling of the cloning scandal by *Science* and Seoul National University with scandalous handling of a fraudulent paper by Columbia U. and the *J. Reprod. Medicine* (WN 2 Jul 04). Because the Columbia prayer study has never been retracted, this absurd publication, with its claim of supernatural intervention, is still listed as a valid scientific study on PubMed.

### Designed lies: the Dover school board did it “time and again.”

(WN 30 Dec 05) “It is ironic that these individuals, who so proudly touted their religious convictions in public would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose

behind the ID Policy.” >From the Jones opinion in *Kitzmiller v. Dover school Board*.

### Breakthrough for 2005: *Science* picks “evolution in action.”

(WN 30 Dec 05) The journal *Science*, made an inspired selection this year. But what really motivated all the work that has gone into showing how evolution works? Is there one great motivator out there?

### The Discovery Institute: our choice as “Spinmeister of 2005.”

(WN 30 Dec 05) In the 150 years since Darwin published his brilliant insight, there has never been another year like this. Books on evolution are tumbling out of the presses; networks are making TV specials; natural history museums are racing to create Darwin exhibits. All because one organization was able to come up with catchy phrases like “only a theory” and “a design must have a designer.” The Discovery Institute deserves an award, they made it happen.

### Alternate world: a leap into hyperdrive? or maybe just hype?

(WN 27 Jan 06) New Horizons, which is on its way to Pluto, is the fastest spacecraft ever built. Even so, the trip will take nine years. At the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics meeting last year, an award was given for a paper about a new propulsion system that could do it in a day. So why are we doing it the old-fashioned way? Because it works. There are two worlds. There is the world that sends robots to explore Mars, finds a vaccine for cervical cancer, unravels the structure of DNA, invents Global Positioning, etc. And then there is an alternate world that discovers cold fusion, homeopathy, the Podkletnov gravity shield, hydrinos, and the Heim space drive. Inhabitants of both worlds speak similar languages, look alike, even have identical DNA. It's not just that things don't work in the alternate world, that can happen even in the real world. But in the alternate world it doesn't seem to make any difference.

### The hydrogen car: transportation in the alternate world.

(WN 27 Jan 06) Huge gaps in virtually every field of science would have to be overcome for a hydrogen car to be feasible. The goal is for hydrogen vehicles to be in showrooms by 2020, 12 years after Bush leaves office. Energy Secretary Bodman kicked off the Washington Auto Show on Tuesday with the announcement of \$119M in funding and a “Research Roadmap.” It's a roadmap of the alternate world.

## Skeptic Ink

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



### Shh! Top climate scientist says NASA tried to silence him.

(WN 3 Feb 06) Physicist James Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies told the New York Times that since he gave a talk at the American Geophysical Union meeting on 6 Dec 05, NASA has screened his coming talks and requests from journalists for interviews. In his AGU talk, Hansen had argued that an increase in automotive fuel efficiency standards would significantly cut emissions. The administration policy is to rely on voluntary measures. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), Science Committee Chairman, admonished NASA Administrator Griffin and pledged to investigate. It's not the first time Boehlert has leaped to the defense of climate scientists. Last July, Boehlert objected to harassment of climate scientists by Joe Barton (R-TX), Energy Committee Chairman (WN 8 Jul 05). WN would suggest that Mr. Boehlert might also want to look into NASA's termination of the Deep Space Climate Observatory.

*Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org*

### Future Meeting Dates

February 11, 2006	July 8, 2006
March 11, 2006	August 12, 2006
April 8, 2006	September 9, 2006
May 13, 2006	October 14, 2006
June 10, 2006	November 11, 2006
	December 9, 2006

Visit our Web site at [www.ntskeptics.org](http://www.ntskeptics.org) for more information.

### The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

### The Skeptical Inquirer

is published bimonthly by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Subscriptions should be addressed to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703. Or call toll-free 1-800-634-1610. Subscription prices: one year (six issues), \$35; two years, \$60; three years, \$84. You may also visit the CSICOP Web site at <http://www.csicop.org> for more information.

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 \_\_\_\_\_

**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.