

**REMARKS OF JOHN H. CALVERT, J.D. to the
KANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION on
April 13, 2005**

Chairman Abrams and Members of the Board,

I am John Calvert and thank you for this opportunity to speak about the hearings.

Thanks also to Mr. Lassey and his colleagues for a good solution to a major educational problem. The comments I have received from a large number of experts echo that praise.

Although the Minority Report has received favorable comment, its authors are not just looking for its validation. They really want to present a good and workable solution to a knotty problem. Accordingly, the witnesses are being asked to candidly offer substantive ways to improve the proposals.

The witnesses consist of five biologists, five biochemists, three chemists, three philosophers of science, a philosopher of religion and education, a geneticist, an oceanographer and origin of life expert, three school teachers, a lawyer and an Islamic expert on evolution. All but four of the witnesses hold doctoral degrees, and most of those are educators.

We expect to present our case through a mixture of both prepared remarks and dialogue. The idea is to encourage the witness to speak candidly about hard questions. Of course each witness will be open to questions from the Committee and any competing perspective.

Although, some question remains about the extent of the opposition, you will not be deprived of that perspective. The Minority Report has been "Peer Reviewed" by 12 scientists solicited by the leadership of the Majority. That "Peer Review" will be dissected by other "Peers" during the hearings.

Opposition to the hearings mystifies and troubles me. My 37 years of experience in resolving controversies has shown that focused communication is the most effective way to solve problems. Sound bites only serve to increase polarization, while focused conversation brings parties together. The hearings are designed to do just that.

The idea of having a science writing committee resolve this controversy is a good one. However, it has not been effective in this case.

The key reason is that the issues are exceedingly complex and involve not only science education, but religion, philosophy and the law. For the most part, the members of the Committee are not equipped to deal with this kind of complexity. Unfortunately, we are in an area that cries out for a variety of experts on both sides of a range of issues.

The other problem is that the writing committee has been polarized from the outset. The leadership of the majority is populated by executives of Kansas Citizens for Science, while the Minority is led by Bill Harris, a managing director of Idnet. The Chairman of the evolution sub-committee is a math teacher who is the Vice President of KCFS. Dr. Harris recognized the problem of polarization at the outset. So he invited the leadership to engage in focused discussions on Key issues. His invitation was declined. Instead, the chairman of the evolution committee organized a public event to marginalize the suggestions of Dr. Harris and his colleagues even before they were presented to the committee as a whole. When subsequent motions were made to have the proposals discussed and voted on, the motions were ruled out of order. Instead of a process designed to enhance open and candid discussion, we had a process that effectively discouraged that discussion.

Don't get me wrong. We are not here because of the wrong intent of anyone involved. All concerned are honestly convinced of their respective positions and there has been a high degree of civility within the committee in a number of areas. The polarization results from the inherent nature of the problem. Religion is necessarily implicated whenever any discussion turns to the origin of life and its diversity. When you go to a party the last thing you want to talk about is religion because you know that will kill the harmony of the evening.

Having focused hearings with experts is a good solution. Hearings will deliver the kind of pointed discussion needed to enable you to make an "informed" decision about how we should conduct a religiously charged discussion with children.

The first proposed change to the Standards in the Minority Report deals with this very issue. It recognizes that to make a GOOD reasoned decision, one must be adequately INFORMED. If one is presented with only one side of a controversy, then don't expect the recipient of the message to "understand" or appreciate the other side.

I am sure Dan Biles will tell you that as members of a public board, you have a duty to make not just reasoned decisions, but reasoned decisions that are INFORMED. The hearings will provide you with the base of information necessary to reach a reasoned decision that is informed.

I expect a number of you have preconceived notions about the Minority Report. I would challenge you to not prejudge it either way. Read it carefully. Go to the hearings. Listen to the witnesses and equip yourself with information on both sides of the issue. Assess the credibility of the witnesses. Understand their motivations. Weigh the evidence and then decide.

Also, whether you are for or against the Minority Report, I hope you will support the hearings and encourage presentations on both sides of the controversy. If there is another legitimate perspective important to the decision, then your colleagues need to hear it. "Understanding" of both sides of the controversy is needed to make an informed decision about the standards.

The argument has been made that the hearings are "rigged." The only manipulative device I am aware of is the boycott. The boycott is rigging designed to coerce silence. It seeks to subvert the information gathering process. It seeks to marginalize a view before it is presented.

The argument has been made that the hearings are too expensive. But the dollars involved are nominal, while the issues are huge. Is this another empty argument designed to silence one side of the controversy?

The hearings will inform not only you, but also the patrons of Kansas public education. The informed voting decisions of the public will be the ultimate test of the propriety of the process.

I don't believe the controversy will go away until the board critically analyzes the problems in a focused inquiry open to the public. The hearings are the best current vehicle to accomplish that goal.

Thank you for you for making this opportunity available to the patrons of public education. In my view, it is this sort of open process that will generate confidence in public education.