

Authors of Proposed Changes to Kansas Science Standards
Dated March 29, 2005
September 27, 2005

To: Members of the Kansas State Board of Education

Re: Letter from THE ELIE WIESEL FOUNDATION FOR HUMANITY dated September 9, 2005, signed by Elie Wiesel and 37 other Nobel Laureates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A study of this letter by anyone familiar with the Changes made by the Board to Draft 2 of the Standards in July suggests that neither Mr. Wiesel nor any of the other Laureates have read those Changes or, for that matter any of the rest of the Standards.

If there were problems with the Changes, one would expect a critic to identify each Change claimed to be in error and the nature of the error. The letter does neither. Instead, it claims that the Changes “*propose including intelligent design in academic curriculum.*” Of course the Changes do just the opposite. If the Changes had been read, one would expect at least one of the 38 signers to have known this to be the case.

Another indication that the signers simply are ignorant of the Changes is this assertion:

“Logically derived from confirmable evidence, evolution is understood to be the result of an *unguided, unplanned process* of random variation and natural selection.”

This assertion is in complete agreement with the Changes that seek to inform students of precisely this claim of evolution:

“Biological evolution postulates an *unguided natural process* that has no discernable direction or goal.” [Grade 8-12, St.3, BM 3, Indicator 1(a)]

Interestingly, it is this Change that has stirred so much controversy. According to Chairman Case, science is *neutral* on whether evolution is a guided or unguided process. Obviously the 38 Nobel Laureates side with the Board rather than him on this fundamental issue.

The letter also demonstrates why the Changes are actually needed. It suggests that the Changes go too far in criticizing evolution (without explaining precisely which Change goes too far):

“We are also concerned by the Board’s recommendation of August 8, 2005 to allow standards that include *greater* criticism of evolution.”

“Greater criticism?” Again, this reflects the Laureates’ complete ignorance of Draft 2. Without the Changes, Draft 2 contemplates introducing students to NO criticisms of evolution. The postulate acknowledged by the Laureates is to be dogmatically taught as fact. The Changes simply seek to begin the teaching of Darwin honestly by exposing students to information that is both relevant and material to the scientific controversy.

The Changes do not address issues of spirituality. Rather they address issues of science which have an enormous impact on both theistic and non-theistic religions and belief systems. By seeking an honest and objective evidence-based discussion of the subject they have the effect of removing a religious problem that currently inheres in the present Kansas Standards.

The scientific validity and educational propriety of the Changes were demonstrated during hearings in May by five PhD biologists/molecular biologists, 4 PhD biochemists, 3 PhD chemists, 1 PhD geneticist, 1 PhD quantum physicist, three philosophers of science (two having PhD's), one PhD philosopher of education and religion, three biology teachers, a Muslim, and a lawyer. The Laureates seem to ignore the fact that this important educational issue is not just about science. It is an issue that touches religion, philosophy, public education and the law. The Laureates are undoubtedly expert in their particular fields, but they are clearly ignorant about both the content and rationale for the Changes. If the Elie Wiesel Foundation deemed this issue so important, it should have arranged for at least some of these experts to join in that discussion at the hearings in May. Why instead did they boycott that opportunity, and choose to criticize the Changes from afar by a written smear that can not be cross examined?

During the open forum of the Board meeting in July we made clear that written criticisms and comments on the Changes should be welcomed if they were focused on the scientific and educational substance of specific Changes. If there are any errors in what has been proposed or if there are better ways to introduce the subject to students, the Board needs to know. We all want good standards. We are not interested in formulas that do not work. However, demeaning rhetoric that does not address specifics but serves only to belittle and misrepresent the Changes is not helpful. It serves only to implement the standard KCFS strategy that seeks to shoot the messenger and thereby kill the message.

We believe the Laureates' letter, which clearly seeks to suppress any criticism of evolutionary theory, powerfully illustrates the need for the Changes. We believe education should inform, not indoctrinate.

Thank you for your kind attention to our views.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Williams S. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Williams S. Harris, PhD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Lassey". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Greg Lassey, MS
For the Authors of the Minority Report

cc: Dale Dennis
Alexa Posney
Diane Debacker
Elie Wiesel
John Calvert