

May 14, 2004

Ms. Martha C. Little, Editor
Day to Day
National Public Radio
9909 Jefferson Blvd.,
Culver City, Los Angeles 90232-3505

Dear Ms. Little,

Rob Crowther forwarded to me your response to Discovery Institute's complaint about Janet Babin's story on Ohio's "Critical Analysis of Evolution" curriculum. Since I was the person from Discovery Institute who NPR interviewed for this program, I am submitting Discovery Institute's further reply.

I am going to limit my response to three main points for sake of brevity:

1. Janet Babin's story communicated the false impression that the Ohio curriculum is about intelligent design. Your effort to deny this after the fact is preposterous. Yes, Ms. Babin opened by saying that Ohio's lesson plan "will teach students how scientists critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory," but her comment was immediately followed by a clip from Lawrence Krauss stating that the controversy is about whether to teach an "alternative theory" in science classes. Your claim that Krauss's comment wasn't really about the Ohio curriculum is outlandish; given the placement in the story, any listener would conclude that he was referring to the lesson plan. Moreover, Krauss's comment was then reinforced by a discussion of intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution and by a comment from Martha Wise explicitly claiming that purpose of the new lesson plan is to teach intelligent design. Because Ms. Babin never quoted any supporter of the curriculum explicitly denying the charge made by Krauss and Wise, listeners were left with the uncontradicted message that their charge was a fact rather than simply an allegation. I would point out that NPR's own staff has interpreted Babin's story in this manner. On its website, NPR has titled Babin's report "'Intelligent Design' Rivals Evolution in Ohio High Schools," and NPR's official summary of the story provided with its transcript states that Ohio approved "a new high school course that provides an alternative to Darwin's theory." Both statements clearly convey as fact (not opinion) that the Ohio curriculum teaches intelligent design. Given that NPR's own staff thinks that Babin's story deals with a lesson plan on intelligent design, how can you seriously contend that listeners would think otherwise? Babin's misleading reporting on this point is all the more unjustified because in my interview I repeatedly denied the claim that the lesson plan was about intelligent design, and she easily could have quoted me making that point.

2. Janet Babin's story falsely claimed that the terms "macroevolution" and "microevolution" were invented by "those who embrace alternatives to

evolution.” As pointed out previously, these terms are standard ones in the scientific literature about evolution. You now seem to concede this fact, but you continue to justify your report by making a new claim that supporters of the Ohio curriculum use these terms in a different way than evolutionists. However, this new claim is not the one made by your original story. Your original story asserted that these terms were invented by critics of evolution. That claim is plainly false, and so it needs to be corrected. By the way, your new claim that critics of evolution use these terms in a different way than evolutionists is also false. If you had spoken with the two state university biologists who served on the science advisory committee responsible for the new curriculum, you would know this. At the very least, if you choose to put forward this view it should be reported as a matter in dispute, not as a fact.

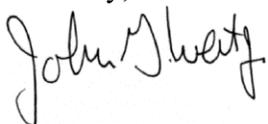
3. Janet Babin’s story presented only one side of the legal debate over the Ohio lesson plan. Babin cited the views of two liberal groups critical of the lesson plan’s constitutionality. But she cited no information from those who defend the constitutionality of the lesson plan, despite the fact that I specifically discussed with her the reasons we think that the lesson plan is constitutional. I should add that when Ms. Babin contacted Discovery Institute she specifically claimed that she wanted to talk with a spokesperson about the constitutionality of the lesson plan. But when she actually conducted her interview with me, she asked me no questions about this topic, and at the end of the interview, I had to make comments about the constitutionality of the lesson plan on my own initiative. Thus, Ms. Babin not only misrepresented the reason for the interview, she also displayed a lack of interest in exploring both sides of the legal debate. Ms. Babin’s completely one-sided treatment of the legal issues surrounding the lesson plan is a clear example of biased reporting. How can you justify presenting only one side of the legal debate?

Finally, I find it interesting that you quote from unpublished transcripts of your interviews in an attempt to justify the errors in your story, but you refuse to release to me a tape of Janet Babin’s complete interview with me. What a convenient way to avoid any independent accountability for your mistakes.

The president of NPR recently testified before Congress that your organization is committed to “balanced, objective and in-depth programming.” Yet this report on Ohio’s evolution curriculum is neither balanced nor objective. Discovery Institute continues to ask that you correct the errors and biased statements contained in this report.

We also insist on a response from NPR’s ombudsman on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John G. West". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John G. West, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Center for Science and Culture
Discovery Institute