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Professor Philip S. Skell
Member, National Academy of Sciences
Evan Pugh Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus
Penn State University

Ohio Department of Education
25 South Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4183

Ohio State Board of Education:

I understand that the Ohio State Board of Education is currently reviewing a lesson plan providing critical analysis of evolution. I am writing—as a member of the National Academy of Sciences—to voice my strong support for the idea that students should be able to study scientific criticisms of the evidence for modern evolutionary theory along with the evidence favoring the theory.

Evolution is an important theory and students need to know about it. But scientific journals now document many scientific problems and criticisms of evolutionary theory and students need to know about these as well. As I wrote to Governor Taft in 2004, Darwinian evolution is an interesting theory about the remote history of life. Nevertheless, it has little practical impact on those branches of science that do not address questions of biological history--the vast majority of fields. Most of the great discoveries in biology and medicine over the last century could have been made without Darwinian evolution and provide little or no support for it. Instead, for those scientists who take it seriously, Darwinian evolution has functioned more as a philosophical belief system, than as testable scientific hypotheses.

Intellectual freedom is fundamental to the scientific method. Learning to think creatively, logically and critically is the most important training that young scientists can receive. Encouraging students to carefully examine the evidence for and against neo-Darwinism, therefore, will help prepare students not only to understand current scientific arguments, but also to do good scientific research.

In 2004 I sent a letter to Ohio Governor Taft encouraging him to support the critical analysis of evolution in Ohio science classrooms. Attached is that same letter, as I again encourage the Ohio State Board of Education to retain its lesson plan on critical analysis of evolution.

I commend you for your efforts to ensure that students are more fully informed about current debates over neo-Darwinism in the scientific community.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Philip S. Skell
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Evan Pugh Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus
Penn State University