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of 2009.

Top Ten Darwin and Design Media News Stories for 2009

- 1. Texas Requires Critical Analysis of Evolution. In a huge victory for those who favor teaching the scientific evidence for and against evolution, the Texas State Board of Education voted in March 2009 to require students to "critique" and examine "all sides of scientific evidence" and specifically required students to "analyze and evaluate" the evidence for major evolutionary concepts such as common ancestry, natural selection, and mutations. "Texas has sent a clear message that evolution should be taught as a scientific theory open to critical scrutiny, not as a sacred dogma that can't be questioned," said Dr. John West, Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute. The Texas board was influenced by the testimony of multiple Ph.D. scientists and academics who spoke in favor of objective evolution education, including Charles Garner, Ralph Seelke, Stephen Meyer, Ray Bohlin, Donald Ewert, Sara Kolbe Hicks, and others. This debate is not over, as Darwinist textbook publishers are already defiantly declaring that they intend to "abide by the letter, but not the spirit" of the new standards. ARN's Kevin Wirth documents over forty media stories that offer a multitude of "cultural spins" on this key decision.
- 2. Louisiana Implements Academic Freedom Act. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted unanimously on January 15, 2009 to adopt rules implementing the Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA), the landmark academic freedom bill passed the previous summer. The Louisiana Darwin-lobby didn't give up, and it was not until September, 2009 that rules respecting the intent of the law were finally safeguarded. The rules approved by the BESE allow teachers to use supplementary materials to teach controversial scientific theories without threat of recrimination. According to Discovery Institute education policy analyst Casey Luskin, "This is another victory for Louisiana students and teachers academic freedom to learn about scientific controversies over evolution and other topics in the curriculum." Several Louisiana scientists testified in favor of academic freedom of evolution-education, including biologist Wade Warren, biochemist Brenda Peirson, and chemistry professor Joshua Williams. Meanwhile published protests against the vote exposed the intolerance of some scientists who oppose the use of critical thinking skills on controversial scientific theories such as evolution, the origin of life, global warming, and human cloning in public schools.
- 3. Polls Show that Americans Overwhelmingly Support Academic Freedom in Evolution Education. A nationwide Zogby poll taken in January 2009 indicates that support for the freedom to teach the controversy about Darwinian evolution cuts across religion, party affiliation, political ideology, and educational levels. A large majority of respondents (80%) agree that teachers and students should have academic freedom to discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of evolution as a scientific theory, with more than half (54%) saying they strongly agree. Only 16% disagree. Says Dennis Wagner, ARN's Executive Director, "Although some media consistently portray support for the freedom to discuss both sides of the evolution debate as the view only of conservative Christians, these poll results paint a very different picture. They shatter some preconceptions about who supports letting students hear a balanced presentation on Darwinian evolution and who doesn't." It turns out that: **Democrats** (82%) support freedom to discuss Darwinism's "strengths and weaknesses" even more overwhelmingly than

Republicans (73%); Self-identified **liberals** (86%) favor it more than conservatives (72%); **College graduates** (84%) support it more than those without a college degree. Individuals identifying with no Christian or Jewish denomination support it by nearly 82%.

- **4. The Darwin Bicentennial Bust.** One of the biggest media stories of 2009 was actually a non-story. Apart from the special issues of several science magazines and a couple TV programs celebrating the Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his theory, there was little true public adulation of Darwin. Some of the big planned media events such as the <u>Ida fossil</u>, turned out to be a scientific bust and left Darwin's theory with a black eye (again). Rumors of <u>revolutions in biology</u> and a <u>post-Darwinian world</u> began to appear in the scientific literature in a year in which we were supposed to be celebrating Darwin's theory. Even Simon Conway Morris said in the journal *Current Biology* that some in his contingency were suffering from "Darwin fatigue."
- 5. Discover Magazine Names Forrest Mims to Top 50 Brains in Science List. While Ben Stein and Michael Behe were "expelled" for pursuing intelligent design concepts, Discover Magazine stood by its decision to name ID sympathizer, Forrest Mims III, to its 50 Most Important, Influential, and Promising People in Science list in the December 2008 issue. Known for his work in atmospheric research and publications in 70 magazines and science journals, Mims once lost his columnist job at Scientific American because he was not a Darwin sympathizer. According to Dennis Wagner, ARN Executive Director, "Perhaps this is a sign of progress in the Darwin and Design debate when a scientist is recognized for his achievements, rather than expelled for his opinions."
- 6. California Science Center Sued over Cancellation of Darwin's Dilemma Film Showing. Amid allegations that they were pressured by colleagues at the Smithsonian Institution, the University of Southern California, the Huntington Library and elsewhere, California Science Center cancelled the October 25th IMAX showing of Darwin's Dilemma, then refused to disclose public documents in the matter. In November 2009 the American Freedom Alliance, a non-profit group, filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles against a state science museum for cancelling the event exploring topics of evolution and intelligent design. The group says its free speech rights were violated when the CSC abruptly reversed its decision to allow the showing of the pro-intelligent design documentary, Darwin's Dilemma: The Mystery of the Cambrian Fossil Record. The program was also scheduled to screen a pro-evolution film but, the lawsuit alleges, museum officials feared discussion of intelligent design in any context. A second lawsuit filed in December by the Discovery Institute claims the California Science Center unlawfully refused to disclose public documents regarding the decision that were sought under the California Public Records Act. At issue is the fact that the California Science Center is a government agency, not a private organization. As a part of California state government, the Science Center is required to abide by the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech. "Unlike private groups or individuals, a government agency is obliged to treat all citizens equally regardless of their viewpoint," says Casey Luskin, an attorney at Discovery Institute. "In this case, once the California Science Center decided to rent its auditorium to the public, it couldn't discriminate against groups whose viewpoints it might not favor. The Science Center's refusal to grant pro-ID groups equal access to its facilities is viewpoint discrimination, and a clear violation of the right to free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment" concluded Luskin.
- 7. Michael Behe Expelled from Bloggingheads. On August 26, 2009, an interview between John McWhorter and Michael Behe about Behe's recent book The Edge of Evolution appeared on bloggingheads.tv. Within hours the interview disappeared with this message "from" McWhorter posted by the administrator: "John McWhorter feels, with regret, that this interview represents neither himself, Professor Behe, nor Bloggingheads usefully, takes full responsibility for same, and has asked that it be taken down from the site. He apologizes to all who found it's airing objectionable." A public outcry resulted, due to the seemingly open-minded editorial policy of the organization ("We pride ourselves on having a diversity of views in our diavlogs and an accordingly diverse comments section, where thoughtful disagreement is expressed in civil terms.") Cooler heads prevailed at Bloggingheads and the Behe interview was reinstated with an apology. Michael Behe reported on the experience one day before the interview reappeared. Journalist Denyse O'Leary, who covers intelligent design and other controversial issues, comments, "The central issue here is that media are not public relations agencies. If a person agrees to discuss a controversial topic in public, they have no business demanding that the medium scrub whatever they said or did later just because it generated some heat. Wouldn't every

politician in the country want that? Congratulations to Bloggingheads for rethinking their position and taking a stand now."

- 8. Federal Court Dismisses Evolutionist Lawsuit in Texas. A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit on March 31, 2009 by a former Texas state science curriculum director, Chris Comer, who alleged that she was illegally fired for sending out an e-mail about a lecture criticizing those who want to teach alternatives to evolution in science classes. While National Center for Science Education and national media saw the matter as evidence of discrimination against evolutionists, Internal Texas Education Agency (TEA) documents obtained by Texans for Better Science Education (TBSE) under the Texas public information act reveal that Comer had a long history of "insubordination" and "misconduct." Comer had been disciplined for at least eight separate incidents, seven of which had nothing to do with evolution. As Mark Ramsey of TBSE observed in an earlier press release "It appears that Ms. Comer was not fired, but resigned after a history of disciplinary issues. If Darwinists want to create a scandal and invent a martyr for their cause, they appear to have picked the wrong case."
- 9. Ben Stein Expelled from the University of Vermont. Actor, TV host, and economist Ben Stein, who hosted the 2008 film Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed, learned firsthand in February 2009 what it feels like to be "expelled." Apologizing for inviting gifted actor and writer Ben Stein to be commencement speaker at the University of Vermont, President Daniel Fogel has highlighted what he called Stein's "highly controversial views" about "evolutionary theory, intelligent design, and the role of science in the Holocaust." Fogel attempted to make penance for inviting Stein by claiming that "Commencement should be a time when our community gathers inclusively, not divisively." Some critics have noted that inclusivity must have a special meaning because in 2007 Fogel chose as commencement speaker Democratic congressman John Lewis, who in 1995 compared Republicans to Nazis. For Lewis, this was not an incidental lapse in taste. Last year Lewis compared John McCain and Sarah Palin to segregationist George Wallace and racist church bombers. Fogel's 2006 commencement speaker was Gustavo Esteva, a far-left activist and advisor to the radical Zapatista National Liberation Army in Mexico. Says Dr. John West, Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute, "In today's academic double-speak, invitations to far-left revolutionaries and race-baiting Congressmen are apparently "inclusive," while inviting a speaker who favors free speech on the issue of evolution is beyond the pale." According to reports, Stein withdrew "voluntarily," after he received a phone call from Dr. Fogel, which many believe, made clear he was no longer welcome.
- 10. Evolutionary Psychology Finally Comes Under Media Attack. In an effort to make the science press sound a bit less like the *National Enquirer*, Sharon Begley for <u>Newsweek</u> and David Brooks for the <u>New York Times</u> start to question some of the absurd theories fostered upon the public in the name of "evolutionary psychology." Many thoughtful people are beginning to express concern about the attention given to speculation about human psychology based on what our remote ancestors supposedly did. For the most part, we don't know what they did, because they did not write anything down. The criticism is that evolutionary psychology dwells on unfalsifiable and often trivial concepts such as "Why men are big spenders" or "Why women love to shop", which reflect only the popular beliefs of our own culture today.

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