

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

Volume 7, Number 9

September 1999

Kansas Evolution Decision's Aftermath

Similarities in Illinois, Impacts in Presidential Race

by David Bloomberg

As I'm sure most, if not all, of you already know, the Kansas Board of Education voted to remove evolution, and other references to the age of the Earth and universe, from its science curriculum. The result was an outcry that, frankly, gave me great joy.

Now don't get me wrong – I certainly got no joy out of the backwards school board members who don't have a clue about what science is. The joy I got came from the media pointing out that the backwards school board members had no clue what science is! How often is an issue this important to us trumpeted across the top of the Chicago Tribune's front page? (8/12) Not to mention that they actually agreed with us!

How bad was it? Some members of the science panel who had worked for the Board issued a statement denouncing the standards; the curriculum committee didn't want their names associated with the standards; even the governor of Kansas was aghast and called the vote, "out of sync with reality."

The hoopla surrounding this vote also allowed the Tribune to talk to Mollene Matsamura, of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), about the standards here in Illinois. She pointed out that our standards contain "sins of omission" – you will not find the word "evolution" in our standards.

While the Illinois standards are not quite as bad as Kansas, this gives us a chance to bring up, once again, the fact that they are somewhat backwards in this day and age. The Kansas standards are worse because they removed everything related to evolution, other than some references to "microevolution." They removed references to the age of the Earth, the age of the universe, etc. They also inserted a few hidden creationist-related portions, such as suggesting schools teach things about which the Institute for Creation Research conveniently publishes materials.

So, Illinois isn't quite as bad. But it's bad enough that we need to get it changed. It's purposely vague, to the point that if a teacher was challenged on why s/he is teaching evolution, it would be hard to point to the standards and use them to back

up that teacher. Sure, there is some reference to fossils and adapting, but the fact is that it's just not good enough. Evolution is the foundation of biology; it is, as a guidebook from the National Academy of Sciences says, "a central organizing principle that biologists use to understand the world." It should not be relegated to the vague terms found in the Illinois standards.

The Tribune article was pretty good about pointing these things out, and also explaining the proper use of the term "theory," which many non-scientists improperly use to mean a "guess," noting that biologists say the theory of evolution is "overwhelmingly supported by fossil evidence and observed trends in living species."

The Chicago Sun-Times, in an interesting vein, had a column by film critic Roger Ebert giving the thumbs-down to the Kansas Board (8/16). He notes that no matter what your beliefs about God, it seems odd that He would provide evidence to lead science "down a blind alley just to disguise the majesty of his creation." He adds, "God is not a practical joker." Later, he says, "I believe it is our duty as intelligent beings to examine the evidence and draw the best conclusions we can. If we want to believe that God set evolution into motion, that is our privilege. But surely if there is a God, then it is a sin against his creation to ignore the evidence he left us and make up a theory of our own – to make it against the law to admire the handiwork of the creator." This last quote is actually rather similar to one from Galileo, who once said, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use."

The media attention focused on Kansas has given us a golden opportunity to shine some of that light on our own state

(Continued on page 7)

Here in Illinois, our standards contain "sins of omission" — you will not find the word "evolution" in our standards.

In This Issue

Kansas Evolution Decision's Aftermath.....	1
REALLity Check	4
Letter to the Editor	5
You Don't Have to Cheat to Get it Wrong!	6

Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Annual Membership Rates: Regular, \$20; student, \$15; family, \$30; patron, \$50 or more; subscription only, \$12.

Board of Directors

Chairman	David Bloomberg
Vice Chairman	Jim Rosenthal
Secretary-Treasurer	Bob Ladendorf
Newsletter Editor.....	Wally Hartshorn
At-Large Members	Prof. Steve Egger David McMaster (one vacancy)

Editorial Board

Wally Hartshorn
David Bloomberg
Jim Rosenthal

Unless otherwise stated, permission is granted to other skeptic organizations to reprint articles from The REALL News as long as proper credit is given. REALL also requests that you send copies of your newsletters that reprint our articles to the above address.

The views expressed in these articles are the views of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of REALL.

REALL Contacts

REALL Hotline..... 217-726-5354
Chairman, David Bloomberg..... chairman@reall.org
Editor, Wally Hartshorn editor@reall.org
Web Site..... www.reall.org



A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Central Illinois. To become a patron member of REALL, please use the membership form insert. Patron members are:

David Bloomberg,
Springfield

David Brown,
Danville

Alan Burge, D.D.S.,
Morton

David Gehrig,
Champaign

Charles Hanson,
Springfield

Wally Hartshorn,
Springfield

Bob Ladendorf,
Springfield

John Lockard, Jr.,
Urbana

Bill Mellon,
Valparaiso, Indiana

James Rosenthal,
Springfield

Doug Smith,
Springfield

Richard Walker,
Springfield

Predictions

- More Weird Web Sites
- Book Reviews
- Skeptic Music



From the Chairman

Well, our August meeting certainly brought out a crowd! In case you weren't there (and shame on you if you weren't), David Gehrig spoke about "The Bible Codes" and gave us all a short lesson in statistics at the same time.

Among the other things he noted, he mentioned an old joke about a man who sees a farmer's barn covered with targets and notices that all the bullet holes are smack in the middle of the bulleeyes. He tells the farmer that he's impressed with how good a shot he is, and the farmer responds that it's nothing special: First he shoots at the barn, then he paints the targets around wherever he hits!

This, David noted, is how "Bible Codes" work. You look until you find something – anything – and then you comment on how remarkable it is that you found that particular thing. Frankly, that can apply to lots of things we deal with – everything from Nostradamus to "psychic" predictions involving missing people.

In illustrating this point, David took out a deck of cards, shuffled them, and drew a poker hand of 5 random cards. He pointed out that the odds against him drawing that particular hand were astronomical – yet he performed this miracle right in front of our eyes. Why? Because he calculated the odds after he'd already drawn the hand. Now, if he had painted his target ahead of time – telling us what cards he would draw and then doing so – that would have been an impressive miracle. But hindsight is 20/20, and so is statistical analysis in this type of situation.

His presentation was not without some, er, detractors. Several men in the back of the room came to hear information supporting the Bible codes, and did not appear terribly interested in hearing anything that contradicted their preconceived views. They interrupted David several times, once asking flat-out if he was there to support or "slam" the codes. Before David could really answer, several other audience members said they didn't want to know – they just wanted to hear what he had to say, so the guy withdrew his question.

One of his friends broke in several times with seemingly unconnected tangents, such as pointing to a Hebrew letter "shin" David had placed on the overhead projector, and saying something about how you can see it in a picture of something-or-other from space (sorry, didn't get the whole detail on that one). Then he completely missed the entire point of David's presentation by claiming that if you add up the Hebrew letter values (Hebrew letters also double as numbers) in "Lord Jesus Christ," you get the latitude or longitude (again, didn't catch it exactly) of Jerusalem – so that proves, er, something. Also, if you stack all the planets together, you get the same number, with lots of zeroes behind it. There were so many problems with both of these claims, it was hard to know where to start, so I didn't. For one thing, he made it clear that he was not there to discuss these things – just to have his own view supported. For another, his heckling had already turned the crowd

From the Editor

Evolution, evolution, evolution! The Kansas State Board of Education doesn't want to talk about it, but their actions last month resulted in the thrusting back into the spotlight of the creation/evolution controversy. As David's article discusses, the debate encompasses far more than just the schools in Kansas.

Michael Shermer recently posted a message on the Internet asking for feedback about the design and content of Skeptic magazine. How can we make skepticism more attractive for a mainstream audience without watering it down? That's quite a difficult problem. This issue features an article by Bob Steiner that discusses the challenges faced by skeptics in presenting our case to the public in a manner that is both logical and engaging.

We also received a nice letter to the editor from a reader commenting on one of Martin Kottmeyer's recent articles. The reader is in Wisconsin and he read the article on the web site — an example of the way the Internet can make it easier to reach the public. ♡

against him, and they already saw the same flaws in his argument that I had. Just to name a few of these flaws: Presuming Jerusalem really is at that point, why did he have to add up "Lord Jesus Christ"? Why not just "Jesus Christ" or "Jesus" or "Jesus Christ Messiah," or "Jesus, Son of God" or any of the many other ways to say the same thing? Why? Because he first shot at the barn, and then he painted the target. If any one of these had added up to the right number instead of the one he used, you can bet he'd have been sitting there proclaiming that as proof of his claim. Similarly, with the stack of planets, he didn't even say what units he was using. Meters? Feet? Inches? Miles? Furlongs? Etc. More shooting before painting.

Most of the audience, however, was there to hear David speak. There were a lot of good questions (especially once the three guys in back left) and I was glad to see so many new faces. I hope we'll see them again.

September Meeting

This month, we feature another Skeptics Society videotaped presentation: Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture, with David Skal. Skal is described as a historian of horror and monster films and popular culture, and has written several books on the subject. In his presentation, he talks about the mad scientist's cultural significance, how Frankenstein spurred the invention of the cardiac pacemaker, the folklore of UFOs, and a hit parade of mad scientists, demented doctors, and assorted evil geniuses to help you catch up on your B-movie classics! The folks at the Skeptics Society recommended this as a fun talk, so I hope to see you on Tuesday, September 7 (the day after Labor Day) at 7:00 in the Lincoln Library! ♡

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

First, we'll start with the overflow we couldn't fit into last month's issue (I told you last month that there was a lot of stuff!).

"Er, Did We Say July?"

In case you didn't already know, **Nostradamus** predicted that horrible things would happen in July of 1999. In fact, it was, according to **James Randi**, "the only prophecy Nostradamus made that mentions an exact date."

The *State Journal-Register's* "Beliefs" section had an article from the Religion News Service (7/4) which took a fairly good look at the Nostradamus claims. The author starts by noting that his supporters claim he successfully predicted all sorts of events and then further adds that his detractors "say he was a mediocre 16th century astrologer with no special gifts, whose vague writings have been wildly overinterpreted."

Some Nostradamus believers think that Russia will launch a nuclear attack on Europe this month; others believe a new comet will crash into Earth (even though astronomers have noted that this is impossible); still others think the Cassini space probe, carrying plutonium fuel, will collide with Earth as it flies by in August (which would be close enough to July for those believers).

Randi was quoted extensively, noting that "Nostradamus has a record of being very, very wrong" and that "He made 104 verifiable predictions, in which he actually named a place or a person or a time. He's been wrong on 103 of the 104. We'll have to wait to see if he has a perfect record."

One side note: Some Nostradamus believers have indicated that since nothing bad happened in July, he might have meant September because September was the seventh month in the old calendar system (sept = seven). So apparently this great psychic couldn't foresee the proper calendar...

I See Bars In Your Future...

Police in New York City have been running Operation Crystal Ball to crack down on psychics and the con games they act as fronts for. According to the New York Times (6/30), "**Pamela Miller**" was arrested on June 24 for pulling the curse removal scam on at least one person.

The curse removal scam involves a fortune teller who claims her client/victim has been targeted by a curse, and she can cure it by drawing the evil out of the client. Then she does all sorts of things to show that she is drawing the evil out (such as rubbing an egg around the client and then breaking it open to show a reddish mass inside – that is the evil), all of which eventually culminates in the client handing over loads of cash

that are supposed to be burned or buried (for money is the root of all evil, after all), but somehow tends to end up instead in the fortune teller's pocket.

Miller was the 13th such arrest. According to Dateline NBC, who had pieces on these scams back in late 1994 and early 1995 (see "REALLity Check" columns in December 1994 and February 1995, Vol. 2, #12 and Vol. 3, #2), Miller has been accused of taking almost \$750,000 from two victims in this type of scam. Yes, you read that right; no, I didn't misplace a decimal point.

When Dateline saw Miller's photo, they thought she looked familiar. Lo and behold, she had been one of the fortune tellers visited with a hidden camera for the earlier report, except she went by the name "Mrs. Grace" then. So they revisited the story (6/30), including again showing how the con women do the egg trick (pushing the reddish mass through the egg as they're breaking it, to make it appear the mass was inside the egg). What was somewhat funny in watching it again was that "Mrs. Grace" wasn't even really any good, in my opinion. She spoke in a monotone, acting like she was reading unemotionally from a script. Yet people bought this act!

Miller's lawyer, who spoke to Dateline, really didn't help his client's cause. He claimed she is a spiritual advisor and the people gave her their money willingly. Dateline showed him the previously-made tape of his client, and he said it looked like the egg trick was "used for the purpose of making the individual feel a certain way," sort of like a therapist might try to help a patient feel a certain way. But he also admitted it was "an illusion," and further acknowledged that an illusion is a type of trick. So, the interviewer asked, what was the purpose. He said he didn't know, and they'd have to ask somebody who did this type of thing.

Little did he know that Dateline had already done so for their first pieces. A former fortune teller said the purpose was to scare people out of their money! Hmmm, maybe Miller should consider getting new counsel before going to trial...

The New York City police said this operation has caused a noticeable decrease in New York fortune teller activity, but it is likely they just picked up shop and moved somewhere else until the heat is off. But hopefully this Dateline piece reached a few additional people and reminded others about the tricks of the trade.

The New York City police said this operation has caused a noticeable decrease in New York fortune teller activity, but it is likely they just picked up shop and moved somewhere else until the heat is off. But hopefully this Dateline piece reached a few additional people and reminded others about the tricks of the trade.

Alien Nation or Alienation?

It was a good few days for Dateline NBC, as they also featured a piece on Joe Firmage, the "computer whiz kid" who made millions with his company, U.S. Web, and then left it so he could preach his belief that aliens are among us, and have

Why does Firmage take his beliefs so seriously? Because he had an alien visitation in which he chatted with the being, who then sent a blue glowing ball of energy into him.

been for millenia (6/27).

Firmage believes that aliens played essential roles in human religious history. For example, he attributes the appearances of angels, miracles, etc. all to aliens. You can read about his beliefs in his monster online book, *The Word Is Truth*. He says the evidence is “overwhelming” that aliens are here, and anybody who disagrees just hasn’t done their homework.

Enter Frank Drake, a professor of astronomy and head of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) project – the project that looks for evidence of radio waves emanating from distant planets, which might be evidence of life there. Drake, who one might say has done his homework, noted that there is simply no evidence for Firmage’s claims.

Why does Firmage take his beliefs so seriously? Because he had an alien visitation in which he chatted with the being, who then sent a blue glowing ball of energy into him.

Drake said he’d be the happiest guy in the world if aliens showed up, but the fact remains that it just hasn’t happened. Try telling that to Firmage.

The looks on the Dateline interviewer’s face when he was talking to Firmage were great. They ranged from mild interest to one that just screamed, “Man, you’re nuts!”

Shrouded in Mystery

Speaking of screaming, I was about ready to do so when new claims about the Shroud of Turin appeared all over the place (including an AP story in the *State Journal-Register*, 8/3). It doesn’t matter how many scientific tests, including carbon dating, etc., show that this thing originated between 1290 and 1390; it doesn’t matter that it didn’t show up anywhere until 1355; it doesn’t matter that there is a letter from Bishop Pierre d’Arcis to Pope Clement VII, in 1389, notes that the shroud is a “clever sleight of hand” and that the person who brought it forward is “falsely declaring and pretending that this was the actual shroud in which our Savior Jesus Christ was enfolded in the tomb” and that he did so “so that money might cunningly be wrung” from the people who would come to see it. I guess all of these dates are just a big coincidence, because somebody found pollen on the shroud. So that proves it!

Basically, the articles were based on a claim by botany professor Avinoam Danin of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He said that he studied pollen grains from the shroud, and they point to Jerusalem around the year 800.

Unfortunately, according to Joe Nickell of the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), these claims were “based on earlier, scientifically discredited data.”

According to the CSICOP release, the “source for the pollens was a freelance criminologist, Max Frei, who once pronounced the forged ‘Hitler Diaries’ genuine. Frei’s tape-lifted samples from the Shroud were controversial from the outset since similar samples taken by the Shroud of Turin Research Project in 1978 had comparatively few pollens. As it turned out, after Frei’s tapes were examined following his death in 1983, they also had very few pollens—except for a particular one that bore a suspicious cluster on the ‘lead’ (or end), rather

than on the portion that had been applied to the shroud.”

You can find the entire CSICOP release at their website: <http://www.csicop.org/articles/19990806-shroud/> -- I also recommend taking a look at the *Skeptic’s Dictionary* entry on the shroud: <http://skepdic.com/shroud.html>.

Holy Window, Batman!

And now, for more miracles – these a bit closer to home. The Chicago Sun-Times reported that a little boy in Joliet saw an outline of the Virgin Mary on the attic window of an empty house (8/3). Must be a miracle! At least, that’s what many visitors apparently think. In fact, they think it resembles “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” who supposedly appeared to a Mexican peasant boy in 1531.

One visitor, Anne Egan, was quoted in the story as saying, “Nobody did this, it just appeared, it can’t be explained.” Ah, it’s so nice when the media quotes skeptics who think critically instead of just jumping to conclusions.

The article did note that the image is only visible at certain angles, but that’s about it. No skeptics were interviewed, none of the many simple explanations given (it’s a stain on a window, folks – the rest is in your head, like a Rorschach test). In other words, par for the course. ☹



Letter to the Editor

I enjoyed Martin S. Kottmeyer's "Graying Mantis" [May 1999], with its long list of mantis-like (and other "bug"-like) aliens and other mythical figures in the literature and film of popular culture. I was surprised to notice one omission: the locust-like Martians who created humanity and linger as a racial memory or archetype, their antennae being remembered as horns on devils' heads, in the 1968 Hammer film *Five Million Years to Earth*, part of the Quatermass series. Surely this was a noteworthy contribution to the popularity of insect/alien imagery. (See a review at: <http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/3-4-97/five.htm>)

Also, Robert Anton Wilson's book *Cosmic Trigger* (vol. 1) commented on parallels between modern UFOlogy and the old Fairy Faith, including the recurrent tales of abduction by fairies or elves, now reprised as abduction by flying saucer crews. Surely it becomes relevant to mention the insectile elements of fairy imagery, such as wings.

Good article, Mr. Kottmeyer!

John S. L. Singleton
Milwaukee, WI ☹

You Don't Have to Cheat to Get It Wrong!

by Bob Steiner

When we skeptics speak, especially from a stage or the front of a crowded room, we find that our skeptical views are frequently challenged.

How do we reply to those challenges and inquiries?

Step One: When we started out, we stumbled with our replies. Our thinking was skeptical and logical, but we lacked specific information for quick replies. Being bright students, we quickly learned that we had better do our homework.

Step Two: Armed with information, our replies became detailed and specific. We learned to cite pertinent scientific studies, as well as examples from the history of science. We learned to think on our feet. We did rather well with this approach.

Step Three: Somewhere along the line we concluded that a response that is brief, and is also snappy, pithy, humorous, and/or challenging beats hands down the elaborate, tedious, detailed reply we had used in Step Two.

Three examples should suffice to make the point.

Example One:

I addressed a group that had a large proportion of believers in the paranormal. My presentation was titled "ESP-A Demonstration." I posed as a psychic, and convinced the overwhelming majority of the audience that I am indeed psychic. Then I told them that I am a professional magician, and that everything they had seen had been done by normal means.

In the question and answer period that followed, someone asked about my background. I inquired: "Are you asking about my credentials?" The person responded that he was.

I quickly assessed the situation. Do I answer his question in the expected manner? Hmmmm. I'm a Fellow of CSICOP, was National President of The Society of American Magicians, am on the Board of Advisors of the National Association of Bunco Investigators, am on the Board of Directors of the National Council Against Health Fraud, and more. Hmmmm.

Nope. I decided on a different approach. I replied: "A significant credential is that I was able to convince many in this audience that I am indeed psychic. But to specifically address your question: There are no credentials in a field that studies something that does not exist!"

That succeeded. They did not know how to argue with or refute that statement.

Example Two:

I was fascinated by astrology. When challenged, I could cite studies that had failed to validate the existence of astrology. I could explain that the gravitational pull of the hospital itself at the time of birth is greater on the baby than the sum of the gravitational pull of all stars and all planets, save only the Sun and Moon. I had an estimate of the number of stars in the universe, provided to me by a brilliant astronomer (thank you, Andy Fraknoi). That enabled me to point out the absurdity of presuming that a handful of stars governed one's entire life, throughout life.

I was frequently a guest on The Jim Eason Show, in San Francisco. Jim is an alert radio talk show host. He was familiar with my views, and had heard some statements I had made about astrology.

On one appearance on his show, Jim's very first question to me, at the top of the program, was: "Bob, you have defined astrology in just three words. What are those three words?"

I replied: "Astrology is bigotry!" And all the phone lines lit up. A lively interview followed. There was never a lag in callers wanting to get in on the action.

That was a defining moment in my education. Jim's keen knowledge of what plays well with an audience was passed on to me during that program. I realized that those three words brought more response and raised more passion in the listeners than did my previous offerings along the lines of: "Astrology has been frequently tested in the scientific laboratory, and has consistently failed to demonstrate its validity." Jim had picked up on an offhand comment that I had made, recognized its significance, and moved it to center stage, where it belonged.

Thank you, Jim Eason.

Example Three:

A self-proclaimed clairvoyant addressed a group in San Francisco. I was invited to attend, not as a presenter, but as an audience member.

The clairvoyant had people write questions on slips of paper. The folded papers were passed up to the front of the room. I watched carefully but did not detect any trickery. Other than using accomplices, which certainly had to be considered, I could not think of any way the presenter could have learned what was on the papers.

Then came her demonstration. She postured as though she were answering the questions that she had picked up "clairvoyantly" from the papers that she had-apparently-never touched and to which she never had access.

Then she decided to challenge me. She requested, nay, dared me to come up to explain to the audience how she had cheated, and how she had gotten access to the information on the folded slips of paper.

I declined her invitation. But she insisted. That sequence repeated twice more.

Finally I said: "This is your show. I am an audience member. I do not want to come up and take over the stage."

At that, her dare turned into a demand and a challenge. She told the audience that I was Chair of Bay Area Skeptics, that I was a professional magician, and that I "always tell people" that clairvoyants use trickery to learn what is on the folded slips of paper.

As I came to the front of the room, I reminded her that I did not want to come up, and that I was coming up at her insistence.

I pointed out that she had "divined" that someone in the back left corner of the room had misplaced or lost some jewelry. No one responded affirmatively to her statement. I

pointed out that she had then expanded it to "someone in the audience." I explained to the audience how broad and general her statement was: In a room of 100 people, it was highly probable that someone had misplaced a piece of jewelry within the past month. However, of the 100 people in this audience, not one of them had lost any jewelry. Then someone in the right front corner of the room piped up: "Last week I lost my car keys." I then evaluated her "reading": "That was a miss!"

I referred to a woman in the audience on whom the performer had done a reading. The reading was that the woman was having trouble with a younger woman in her life: perhaps her younger sister, or perhaps her daughter. I called attention to the fact that that too was a very broad and very general statement — a statement that would apply to a large number of people in virtually any audience. I then stated, as the woman had stated, that her written message was asking about her future employment: "Would she get a raise? Would she get a promotion?"

I evaluated that "reading": "That also was a miss!"

I summed up: "No, you did not cheat. No, you did not gain access to the questions on the folded slips of paper. But you missed! You did not answer the questions on the sheets. There is nothing for me to explain."

Then, returning to my tried-and-true method of preferring

a pithy summary, I explained to the audience: "Before you even begin to try to explain how something happened, you must first determine whether it happened. In this case, it simply did not happen. She did not respond to what was on the slips of paper. There is nothing for me to explain."

That carried the day.

The third example happened several years ago. Recently I told the story to Paul D. Johnston, Executive Director of the International Society for General Semantics, Concord, California.

Paul, who with undue modesty describes himself as a "humorist novice," came up with a better final conclusion than I had summoned up at the time of the event. His statement forced in me a "Gee, I wish I had said that" reaction.

I should have definitely summed up with my statement and explanation that:

Before you even begin to try to explain how something happened, you must first determine whether it happened. And then I should have added the icing on the cake, concluding with the splendid words of Paul D. Johnston: You don't have to cheat to get it wrong!

Reprinted from Skeptical Briefs. Bob Steiner is a CSICOP Fellow and founder of the Bay Area Skeptics.

(Continued from page 1)

standards. I have written letters pointing this out to the Chicago Tribune and the State Journal-Register. In addition, I have written to the new State Superintendent, Glenn McGee, and pointed out how his predecessor, Superintendent Spagnolo, had "evolution" removed from the standards without giving a good scientific or educational explanation. I further noted that it was fairly common knowledge that he did this because of his previous bad experiences with these types of issues in Virginia.

I explained how Ron Larkin and I spoke out against the vague standards at a Board meeting, and how we, and all those who had commented previously, were ignored.

I closed by pointing out that, according to the Board's website, they will consider updates to the standards every three years. Two years have gone by since the current standards were finalized, and I called on McGee and the Board to review our science standards and put evolution back as the foundation of biology, where it rightfully belongs. Depending on what his response is (if any), I think REALL will need to act to bring this issue to the attention of scientists, educators, and the media as we approach that three-year mark in July. (The full text of the letters I sent on this subject can be found at www.reall.org.)

Obviously, many other newspapers, TV news shows, etc. covered this story. For a number of different stories related to this, I would suggest you check out www.skepticnews.com, which has a bunch of links (and happens to be run by our own Editor Wally).

Presidential Campaign Addendum

Just as we were about to go to press, Reuters came out with stories about front-running presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore, dealing with this topic. In short, Bush was asked about the Kansas situation and responded, "I believe children ought to be exposed to different theories about how the world started." His spokeswoman said, "[Bush] believes both creationism and evolution ought to be taught. He believes it is a question for states and local school boards to decide but he believes both ought to be taught." Gore's spokesman, when asked about the situation, said, "The vice president favors the teaching of evolution in public schools. Obviously, that decision should and will be made at the local level and localities should be free to decide to teach creationism as well." Obviously? Apparently, neither candidate is aware of the list of court decisions specifically saying that creationism cannot be taught as science in public schools. Eugenie Scott, executive director of NCSE, was quoted as saying, in response to the Gore statement, "My God, that's appalling!"

She added, "I understand politicians like to compromise and that faced with one group who says two plus two equals four and another group that says two plus two equals six, will tend to arrive at a position that says two plus two equals five. Unfortunately, sometimes the answer has to be four and this is one of those times."

Gore's spokesman did call Reuters back later to say that "the vice president supports the right of school boards to teach creationism within the context of religious courses and not science courses." This is certainly better, but does look a lot like the "two plus two equals five" compromise that Scott mentioned. 🍌



Our Next Meeting

A Videotaped Presentation:
Screams of Reason
Mad Science and Modern Culture
By David Skal

Skal, a historian of horror and monster films and popular culture, and has written several books on the subject. Learn about the mad scientist's cultural significance, how Frankenstein spurred the invention of the cardiac pacemaker, the folklore of UFOs, and a hit parade of mad scientists, demented doctors, and assorted evil geniuses to help you catch up on your B-movie classics!



www.reall.org

Springfield, Illinois
Lincoln Library (7th & Capitol)
Tuesday, September 7, 7:00 PM

Free and Open
to the Public

Rational Examination Association
of Lincoln Land (REALL)
P.O. Box 20302
Springfield IL 62708

