

K-State Physics Professor Says Evolution Debate Damaging State's Educational Reputation

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There are worse jobs than being a science teacher in the state of Kansas. But not much.

According to Popular Science Magazine, only two jobs -- a manure inspector and a human lab rat -- rank lower than a Kansas biology teacher, which is akin to being "on the front lines of science's devolution," the magazine states.

The chief culprit in making this such a lowly occupation? The evolution debate, which is damaging the state's educational reputation, politicizing the classroom and "consuming almost everything we do," according to a past president of the National Association of Biology Teachers interviewed by the magazine.

A Kansas State University professor agrees.

Bharat Ratra, a K-State professor of physics, said the main issue is that some members of the Kansas State Board of Education "really don't like parts of science and instead want intelligent design -- a religious idea -- to be taught as science."

"Science is difficult enough to learn, and teaching a non-science idea like intelligent design in a K-12 science class can only confuse students," Ratra said. "That's a real challenge with the work here, The science standards controversy has made some K-State students feel threatened by

science."

According to Ratra, he occasionally gets students in class "who get upset" when he talks about "how it came to be that people finally accepted that the Earth moves around the Sun." He said students who might get an inadequate science education -- which he said could happen if the new Board standards are passed -- could find that they are unqualified for well-paying jobs in science, medicine and technology.

"The State Board of Education should not do something that might harm the education of Kansas kids," Ratra said.

Ratra was recently designated a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Each year the society elects members whose "efforts on behalf of the advancement of science or its applications are scientifically or socially distinguished." Ratra was recognized by the association for his contributions in cosmology, including the quantum mechanics of inflation, the dynamical effective cosmological constant, and the issue of cosmological space curvature and cosmic magnetic fields.

Ratra's research focuses on "dark energy" which opposes the force of gravity. He co-authored a paper in 1988 predicting that the universe is going to expand faster in the future.

"We know the universe is expanding because we can see galaxies moving apart from each other," Ratra said. "Our model predicted this expansion is going to speed up because of dark energy."

Source: Kansas State University

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