

RELIGION, SCIENCE DON'T MIX

School policy may have the alternate effect as it sparks more interest in philosophy and intelligent design rather than empirical data

By Marshall Berman

In Rio Rancho Pastor Don Schlichte's Tribune article ("Evolving Curriculum," Insight & Opinion, Sept. 6), he contends that the new Rio Rancho School policy 401 does not require the teaching of religion, creationism intelligent design.

But the policy, which he authored and which was passed by the Rio Rancho School Board on Aug. 22, will do exactly that. Indeed, it already has!

Schlichte and other school board proponents argued that data shows evolution's weaknesses and that some scientists believe there are problems with "origins science," a nonscientific phrase often used by creationists. Schlichte said he is not a scientist, but it appears that he has adopted the view of New Mexico Intelligent Design advocates, a tiny activist minority, that does not represent mainstream science.

On the day after the policy was passed, a Rio Rancho student brought a Bible into a chemistry class, and wanted to discuss intelligent design. On the same day, in a different class on Anatomy and Physiology, a student questioned the teacher, and said that brain-neuron-muscle connections were so complex that they had to be intelligently designed. Another student argued that this system evolved. The two students continued to take up class time on other topics that the teacher tried to present. Later in the week, another student brought the Book of Mormon to class to discuss it.

So far, almost all the Rio Rancho science teachers, and every science organization in the state has stated their opposition to

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the policy. All the chairs of the University of New Mexico departments of biology, chemistry, earth and planetary sciences, physics and astronomy, anthropology and mathematics and statistics have stated the new policy should be abolished.

This policy reflects a nationwide, orchestrated strategy to inject supernatural explanations into public school science classes. Similar efforts are occurring in 40 states across the country.

They, and Schlichte, demean science and scientists. By the way, the vast majority of scientists do not insult religious people. Indeed, millions of scientists are Christians, Jews and other believers. Schlichte uses the term "Darwinists" as a deliberate insult to scientists. It's no more correct than calling them "Einsteinists" or "Newtonists."

Schlichte also redefines "critically analyze" to suit his own views. Of course, scientists favor critical analysis, but in the scientific sense, not in the sense of using supernatural causes to explain natural phenomena. Supernatural explanations belong in philosophy or comparative religion classes.

And, obviously there are thousands of supernatural explanations for "cosmological and biological origins." Do we teach them all to be fair and unbiased? Or, just

the one and only scientific explanation, evolution, since these are science, not religion, classes.

Rio Rancho teachers already follow the board's policies concerning controversial issues. But there is no scientific controversy in evolution. It is "intelligent design" that is the political and religious controversy, despite the disingenuous denials of by its advocates.

Schlichte insults those who disagree with him, calling them "fearmongers," opponents of "critical thinking," intolerant, opposed to free speech and freedom of religion. But opponents of the policy are none of these. They strongly favor scientific debate, but not fifth-column attempts to introduce unscientific concepts into science classrooms.

Does Schlichte's concept of academic freedom and open debate also include teaching astrology, holocaust denial, racism, slavery, Jihad or similar concepts in order to present both sides of issues?

Certainly, teachers should respond respectfully to students who raise these issues, and then return to teaching age-appropriate, mainstream science. No new policy is needed for this. It has been and continues to be the best practice of the Rio Rancho science teachers.

But Schlichte actually might do well to sit in on their classes and learn some real science. Then he might reconsider writing such polemic screeds about what science is, trying to make it fit *his* politics and religious views.