

OPINION PAGES

Our
VIEW

Viva evolution

Kansas' schools made curriculum mistake

Thank God we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto, or we may not have come to exist.

Earlier this month, the Kansas Board of Education decided to drop the theory of evolution from its state science standards, sending its schools back a century.

Maybe next they'll start teaching that the world is flat.

Teachers can still teach evolution, but the state won't test students on it.

The decision reinforces hayseed stereotypes of Kansans and erodes the foundation of modern biology.

Religious leaders have heralded the decision. Evolution, they say, merely makes it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.

But worldwide, the scientific community has balked at the decision. Leaders of all six of the state's universities implored the board not to do this, but their arguments were ignored.

Ultimately, the children of Kansas will suffer because of the follies of the state board of education. They will leave high school without understanding one of the most basic concepts of modern science.

Opponents of evolutionary theory argue that it should not be taught because it cannot be proven.

Then again, not much in science can.

Science does not attempt to prove things. It is a system of developing and testing theories of how the world around us works.

If proof were the standard for teaching scientific theories, we would have to get rid of chemistry and quantum physics.

No biology teacher ever asked students to accept evolutionary theories on faith alone. Teachers offer evidence.

The beautiful thing about science is that it is not supposed to be accepted blindly. It is supposed to be doubted.

Most of what we know about the world has been proposed in the last 500 years. Those theories are based on a combination of evidence and inference.

And evidence supporting evolution abounds.

Creationists may dislike evolution because it is not compatible with their beliefs. That does not mean it should not be taught. Students should have the opportunity to understand scientific theories.

Scientific discovery over the next century may even render evolution obsolete.

Until then, evolution should be taught.

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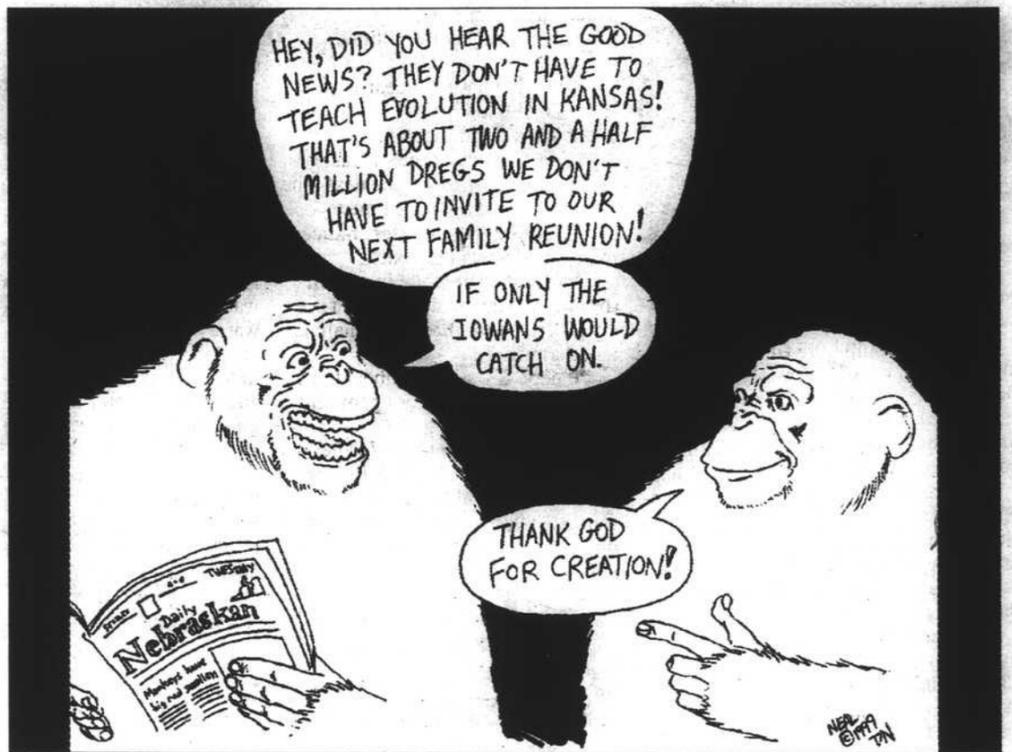
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Obermeyer's
VIEW



Evolution of a treaty

As NATO approaches age 50, world of changes awaits



Today the world celebrates a most portentous anniversary.

Maybe not the whole world, but at least the free world is getting down tonight as it remembers 50 years of faith in freedom.

The former Soviet Union took a blow on This Day in History.

You know it - the North Atlantic Treaty went into effect 50 years ago to combat the influence of the USSR in the Western Hemisphere.

In the short but momentous time between 1945 and 1949, what was already a fragile alliance between Great Britain, the United States and the Soviets in World War II degenerated into an antiunion of mutual fear and distrust.

The Soviets, the scorn of Hitler and co-conquerors of Berlin (though they were there first), occupied almost 180,000 square miles of Eastern Europe immediately following the Nazi surrender in May 1945.

Aside from the Red Scare of the 1920s and the occasional anti-Bolshevik piece of propaganda, it appeared the United States, Britain, France and other assorted Allies could return to prewar tranquillity (for the United States, read: isolationism).

Together, everyone should have backed out of Europe gradually, rebuilding the war-torn continent on the plans of such men as George C. Marshall, Harry S. Truman, Winston Churchill and, for what it's worth, a strong Soviet leader, Josef Stalin.

Instead, Marshall's talents were invested in a courageous but tense airlift in the face of staunch Soviet aggression in the 323-day Berlin blockade.

The rest of the future NATO nations also watched in horror as the USSR's war of attrition against the nations it occupied widened.

Churchill delivered the haunting "Iron Curtain" address in Fulton, Mo. And Truman addressed the free people of the world about the responsibility to maintain the freedoms of the European people in his "Truman Doctrine" speech.

Yet, one by one, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania aligned or were forced to align themselves with the Soviet parent regime.

It was crystal clear the Soviets were not about to back down. Instead, they had adopted a medieval winner-take-all frame of mind in their supposedly peaceful laissez-faire dealings with the nations that would make up the Eastern Bloc, that in effect created the communist puppet governments in those countries.

Soviet armed forces buildup continued and spread.

A small faction in the West counteracted with the preliminary Brussels Treaty of 1948: a token starter pact between France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg that would serve as the progenitor of the NATO alliance. The United States, together with Canada and other Northern European nations, kept a watchful, proactive eye on the situation unfolding in the new Western alliance and the Soviet influence on the East. It was decided a collective defense system would be a necessity in this version of the new world order. Pledged among the member nations of the Brussels Treaty and also including the United States, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Italy, NATO was established on April 4, 1949, a utilization of Article 51 of the United Nations charter - that nations may enter into a contract of collective defense.

The North Atlantic Treaty, however, did not go into effect until 50 years ago today, Aug. 24, 1949.

Then everything changed. There was a Cold War pitting East against West. There were hot wars in Korea and Vietnam. There were nuclear missiles aimed at the United States from the neighboring Soviet-allied nation of Cuba.

The events of the years following NATO's birth on the world stage read like gothic letters carved into a granite slab. There was NSC-68, the U-2 incident, the Kitchen Debates, a feigned air of friendliness between the United States and the USSR that amounted to a drop of rosewater in a great barrel of sludge.

Things thawed for a time in the wake of Gorbachev's economic and social reforms - Perestroika - and it looked as if the East and the West were coming into a peaceful coexistence based on an agreement to disagree.

Then it was all over.

The wall dividing Berlin, a stalwart icon of the Cold War that hunched its shoulders and sat slouched between two worlds came down in 1989. The USSR dissolved in December 1991.

Since then, the role of NATO has been in question, though it still remains on the forefront. There was war in the former Yugoslavia as it fell apart and away from its communist government. Centuries of fighting came to a conclusion several times as the warring cultures signed and subsequently ignored cease-fire agreements.

NATO's new face as the world's authority on and protectorate of democracy and the free people of the world led it to take a role in the Balkans.

"The world is my idea," said German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. So would it seem for NATO, the United Nations and the burgeoning European Economic Community. The world is their idea, for better or for worse.

Now, as NATO seeks to extend its membership to former Eastern Bloc nations, should we begin a debate as to whether or not this mutual defense contract is indeed necessary in the post-Cold War world?

How many alliances can be formed before we are no longer a world of nations but a single nation of the world? Where does NATO's jurisdiction extend now that European communism is a de facto dead horse?

At age 50, NATO may be in for some minor surgery or a full-blown quadruple bypass operation. In either instance, a change in policy, scope and goals has already been ordered. NATO does not need to get any bigger. It does not need to rotate on the same circles and coexist with the EU.

Maybe NATO's job is finished, and it can coast into a well-timed retirement with its children and grandchildren and enemies alike at its side. But then again, maybe not.

If the world is NATO's idea, then the job is not finished and may never come to a definitive end. But the world is not just its idea - the world is all of our ideas together. That's why there are so many forms of government, religion, culture and society.

Who is anyone to protect ideas of democracy and freedom in parts of the world where those sterling concepts are not adhered to?

So Happy Birthday, NATO. We give you the world as we see it, and ask that you would think on it for us as well.

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