

News Digest

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Scientists find states fail evolution education

Nebraska received a C, while Kansas was deemed "disgraceful" and earned an F.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - In a new chapter of a dispute that pits science against religion, a national organization of scientists gave schools in 19 states unsatisfactory grades for teaching evolution. The report, released Tuesday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, grades 49 states and the District of Columbia on the basis of how well evolution is included in the state science education standards. California received the highest rank. Kansas, whose

standards were described as "disgraceful," got the lowest grade. Nebraska received a C in the report, which means the standards are satisfactory but not terribly good, according to the report's Web site.

Six states, including California, were graded at 100. Four states were graded in the 90s and were given As in the report.

Fourteen states were graded at B, 7 got Cs, 6 were given Ds, and 13 flunked. Iowa was not included because it has no statewide education standards, leaving that to each local district.

Linda Holloway, former chairman of the Kansas State Board of Education, said the report was deceptive and "very unfair."

"Clearly they have an ax to grind about evolution," she said in a telephone interview.

Kansas last year rekindled the issue of teaching evolution in public schools when the state board of education, led by Holloway, approved science teaching standards that minimized the importance of evolution and omitted the big-bang theory of the origin of the universe.

Other states have considered similar curriculum changes and some state legislatures have proposed laws that would forbid completely the teaching of evolution in public schools.

Lawrence S. Lerner, who compiled the report for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation,

"Clearly they have an ax to grind about evolution."

Linda Holloway

former chairwoman of the Kansas State Board of Education

said the conflict "is not really about science, but about religion and politics." He calls creationism "a pseudoscientific rival to evolution that the courts have repeatedly held to be thinly veiled religion."

Lerner, a former professor at California State University, Long Beach, said Kansas got such a poor grade because its guidelines forbid teaching anything about the age of the Earth or the universe.

Lerner called the Kansas science education standards "a disgraceful paean to antisense."

Holloway, however, said the report was part of "a campaign of deception" and all districts in Kansas were still teaching evolution.

"All we did was allow local groups to decide how they wanted to teach evolution," she said.

"That is a reasonable thing to do."

World/Nation

The Associated Press

Washington, D.C.

Poverty rate at 32.2 million, lowest point in 21 years

The poverty rate in America dipped last year to 11.8 percent, the lowest point in 21 years, while median household incomes reached a record high, new Census Bureau data showed Tuesday.

Last year, 32.2 million Americans lived in poverty, down from 34.4 million, or 12.7 percent, the previous year, according to the agency's annual reports on income and poverty. The all-time low poverty rate was 11.1 percent in 1973.

With six weeks left before the election, Democrats and Republicans were quick to take credit for the good news.

President Clinton called it "another economic milestone" for the administration, while House GOP leaders cited their own leadership on passing welfare reform as the reason.

"God bless the economy," said Tim Smeeding, professor of economics and public policy at Syracuse University. "Overall, this is the best report I've seen in 20 years."

Others stressed more work needed to be done.

"Our concern is that there not be a view out there that poverty has been eradicated," said Debra Roth, spokeswoman for the National Association of Community Action Agencies. "Our main concern is how many people who have climbed out of poverty who work two or three jobs."

Louisiana

School gun fight leaves boys in critical condition

NEW ORLEANS - Two teenage boys shot and wounded each other with the same gun during a fight at their middle school Tuesday after a 13-year-old expelled student slipped the weapon to one of the students through a fence, authorities said.

The wounded boys, ages 13 and 15, were in critical condition.

Witnesses said the eighth-graders had argued before the shootings at the school where students must pass through a metal detector to enter.

The younger boy got the gun from outside the chain-link fence and shot the 15-year-old, only to have the older boy grab the gun and shoot him, police Lt. Marlon Defillo said.

The younger boy will be charged with attempted murder, Defillo said.

The boy accused of providing the handgun, Alfred Anderson, was being sought, Defillo said. He was recently expelled from the school for fighting.

India

Countries struggle against monsoon rains

NEW DELHI - Floodwaters continued to rise Tuesday in West Bengal state, and an aid worker said some stranded people were so hungry and desperate they were jumping from treetops into passing relief boats.

More than 700 people have died in India and Bangladesh since Sept. 18 when late monsoon rains flowed over riverbanks and dams, drowning the tree-lined frontier between the two countries under 10 feet of water.

An additional 329 people have been killed by flooding in Southeast Asia, where the Mekong River has burst its banks.

The floods left more than 10 million people homeless in eastern India; some 125,000 were reported homeless in Bangladesh.

Australia

Romania protests charges by returning medals

SYDNEY - Romania has returned its remaining two medals in the Olympic women's all-around gymnastics competition to protest Andreea Raducanu's loss of her gold medal for taking cold medication containing a banned substance, Romanian national television reported Tuesday.

"The gold, silver and bronze medals have been returned although initially (Coach) Octavian Belu favored keeping the gold and silver medals, which the Romanians would have won anyway," Romanian TV said in the report from Sydney.

Reno, FBI defend Lee query

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - FBI Director Louis Freeh told Congress on Tuesday prosecutors could have sent scientist Wen Ho Lee to prison for years but agreed to let him plead guilty to a single charge out of fears atomic-weapons secrets would become public at a trial.

"The Department of Justice and the FBI stand by each and every one of the 59 counts in the indictment of Doctor Lee," Freeh told the Senate Judiciary and Select Intelligence committees. "Each of those counts could be proven in December 1999 and each of them could be proven today."

Freeh was joined by Attorney General Janet Reno in defending the government's investigation and treatment of Lee, who was held in solitary confinement without bail for nine months and had to wear leg shackles.

Lee was not present for the hearing. In a statement, his lawyers expressed hope he will be treated fairly by the government and said the scientist hoped in time "the world will better understand that he has been and continues to be a loyal and proud citizen of the United States."

The FBI director acknowledged in written testimony the agents who interrogated Lee should not have reminded him Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in the 1950s for espionage.

Reno said Lee was treated no worse than other prisoners in solitary confinement at the Santa Fe County Detention Facility. All were required to wear leg shackles when being moved outside their cells, she said.

Ultimately those shackles were removed, and unlike the other prisoners in solitary confinement, Lee was allowed to have a radio to listen to music, she said.



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK: To earn money for her family, a little girl dances on Arbat Street on Tuesday in downtown Moscow.

Oleg Nikishin/Newsweek

Runoff could escalate tensions in Yugoslavia

Other countries, including the United States, are pushing Milosevic to concede defeat.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia - Slobodan Milosevic conceded Tuesday that his challenger finished first in Yugoslavia's presidential election and declared a runoff - defying demands at home and abroad that he step down.

Opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica rejected an Oct. 8 runoff, calling it a "fraud" and insisting he won Sunday's election outright. At the same time, he warned against any moves that could raise tensions and called on the opposition to keep to a "nonviolent" response.

The opposition called for a rally tonight in downtown Belgrade to "celebrate its victory" - apparently hoping for a show of strength to demonstrate to Milosevic the public's refusal of a runoff.

President Clinton said it was clear the opposition had defeated Milosevic, who has led Yugoslavia for 13 years. He said the United States would take steps to lift economic sanctions

if the election result was honored.

The announcement of a runoff raises the stakes in the confrontation between Milosevic and the opposition.

The opposition faced the choice of accepting a runoff it considers fraudulent or trying to pressure the hard-line leader - believed to have a firm grip on the top ranks of police and military - to back down.

Two days after the voting, the State Elections Commission released its first results Tuesday, saying Kostunica finished first with 48.22 percent compared to 40.23 percent for Milosevic. The law provided a runoff Oct. 8 if none of the five candidates received more than 50 percent of the votes cast.

State television said the turnout was 64 percent, far below the 74 percent figure given by the opposition.

"We are talking about political fraud and blatant stealing of votes," Kostunica said. "This is an offer which must be rejected."

But he said the opposition would avoid "careless moves which could raise tensions in society, which could lead to unforeseeable consequences."

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Vojislav Kostunica
opposition candidate

Tens of thousands of Yugoslavs jammed the main squares in Belgrade and other major cities for two straight nights after the balloting, celebrating the opposition win and demanding Milosevic step down. Both nights, the rallies ended without friction with police, and Tuesday night there were no crowds in the streets.

The influential leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Pavle, met with Kostunica on Tuesday and urged the ruling coalition "to accept the electoral will of the people and contribute to the welfare of the nation and the state."

The runoff announcement came despite growing international calls for Milosevic to accept an opposition victory.

In Washington, Defense Secretary William Cohen said the United States would not stand by and watch Milosevic

steal the election.

"I think the international community will look very closely, carefully and bring whatever pressure it can for Milosevic to abide by the will of his people," Cohen said. "The people want Milosevic out. Certainly the international community would welcome that result."

Clinton held out to Yugoslavia the prospect of ending of the country's isolation. "If the will of the people is respected, the doors to Europe and the world will be open again to Serbia," Clinton said.

"We will take steps with our allies to lift economic sanctions, and the people of Serbia, who have suffered so much, finally will have a chance to lead normal lives."

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said: "I say to Milosevic: You lost. Go. Your country and the world has suffered enough."

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DAILY NEBRASKAN

Pan Am witness comes up short

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAMP ZEIST Netherlands - A CIA spy testified Tuesday that two Libyans kept bricks of explosives in a desk at Malta airport for at least two years, until a few weeks before Pan Am Flight 103 blew up, killing 270 people.

But the Libyan, who became a CIA mole four months before the bombing on Dec. 21, 1988, unexpectedly ended his testimony after less than a day Tuesday, providing only tenuous links between two Libyan defendants and the explosives.

Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah are charged with murder and conspiracy to murder the 259 passengers on the Boeing 747 and 11 people killed by the flaming debris that plunged 30,000 feet onto the Scottish town of Lockerbie. Most of those on the plane were Americans.

Identified by the pseudonym Abdul Majid Giaka and billed as the prosecution's star witness, Giaka said he worked in Malta since 1986 for Libya's Jamahriya Security Organization, using his job as the assistant station manager for Libyan Arab Airlines as a cover.

He said Fhimah, his immediate boss, kept bricks of explosives locked in a desk at Malta airport for two years - until just a few weeks before the bombing.

Fhimah "told me he had 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of TNT delivered by Abdel Basset," Giaka said, referring to the co-defendant, Megrahi. He said he was told to keep the existence of the explosives quiet.

Giaka also said he saw Megrahi, who had been in charge of airline security, with a "brownish" suitcase similar to the one the indictment says contained the bomb that blew up the airliner.