

Spring

In the Woods where I sometimes go to think, it is a time of great uncertainty, a time of great pending change. After early February's blizzard and exceptional cold, late February has been exceptional - almost summer warmth. The result is that the Woods are now on the brink of the bursting new growth of spring. Buds of elms are swelling. Silver maples are flushing out their delicate blonde and red flowers. The new leaves of the multiflora rose have gone from soft red to bright green.

Over the same weeks of late January and early February we have seen revolutionary change, both abroad in Egypt and the Arab world; and at home. In Washington, DC a new Congress has been debating and amending a budget bill like a bull in a china shop. Many valuable programs supporting science and education are being smashed from the shelves. We do not know what will survive. In Oklahoma a new political majority controlling all the power of the state government has been producing upheaval, debating the control of public education. Three bills, HB 1551, HB 1001 and SB 554; have been introduced seeking to exert political control over the content and conduct of science classes. Supporters of the legislation have campaigned in previous years to challenge the teaching of evolution in our schools. They are part of a large group across our country that denies this foundational concept of modern biology.

From the New York Times Feb 8, 2011:

"Randy Moore, a professor of biology at the University of Minnesota, commented: 'With 15 to 20 percent of (U.S.) biology teachers teaching creationism,'.. 'this is the biggest failure in science education. There's no other field where teachers reject the foundations of their science like they do in biology.'"

Many of you have written letters to the leaders of the legislature expressing your views. It is essential that OAS (that means you) continue and follow each of three legislative bills on the teaching of science.

The Academy's position on this is clearly stated in the following 1981 resolution:

"THE OKLAHOMA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE POSITION REGARDING SCIENTIFIC CONTENT OF SCIENCE COURSES

The scientific content of science courses should be determined by scientists and science teachers and not by political directives. In particular, science teachers should not be required to teach, as science, ideas, models, and theories that are clearly extra-scientific. An extra-scientific hypothesis, as such, might legitimately be discussed in a science class when examination of its logical construction and criteria for acceptance would illuminate the corresponding features of scientific hypothesis and scientific method. Any requirement for equal time for such hypotheses is not justifiable."

http://oas.uco.edu/Scientific_content.html

Our 2007 OAS resolution on Science, Religion and Teaching Evolution has also been widely praised as an inclusive and well-reasoned middle ground.

http://oas.uco.edu/Science_Religion_and_Teaching_Evolution.html

From a personal perspective, I feel the parallels in the natural world and our political world. In both, a new generation and great change are coming. It is a time when trees and all the green world come back to life. When beetles, centipedes and snails in their winter shelters begin to stir and to venture out. It is also a perilous time. Another hard killing frost can come in March. Politics can veer off track and derail science or science education in the U.S. and in Oklahoma with lasting damage. It is a time of uncertainty.

In my senior zoology capstone seminar on the human mind we have this week been reminded of both the naturalistic and moralistic fallacies, the belief that if something is found in nature, it is good, ethical, benign.. and the belief that if something is good, ethical and benign, it will be found in nature. Bearing these philosophical pitfalls in mind, events of these past few weeks combine to give me a heightened sense of what it means to be alive and subject to change. We must be vigilant and alert for opportunity, speak up; work hard for what we believe is right - to survive and grow with this generational change. A new spring and a new time are coming. We must be our best.

Also as a reminder:

Here in early spring, planning is beginning for our **November 11, 2011 Annual Meeting in Durant**. I will be encouraging all section leaders of OAS this spring, to reach out and bring their students and colleagues to the Annual Meeting in Durant. At our 2010 successful Broken Arrow Annual Meeting I asked that each of you personally plan to speak on your work or offer a synthesis of your field. Making plans now to have abstracts ready by mid October and recruiting new faculty to speak, will ensure a successful Annual Meeting this coming November. It is something we can do as scientists and educators when science needs us to speak.