Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2002

Ms. Jennifer L. Sheets
President
Ohio State Board Education
25 South Front Street
Columbus, OH 43215-4183

Mr. Cyrus B. Richardson Jr.
Vice President
Ohio State Board Education
25 South Front Street
Columbus, OH 43215-4183

Dear Ms. Sheets and Mr. Richardson:

We are writing to comment on recent Ohio School Board hearings regarding the teaching of science in Ohio public schools in light of some recent developments in federal education policy. As you know on January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law H.R. 1, the Leave No Child Behind Act of 2001. During the debate concerning H.R. 1, Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) introduced an amendment, regarding teaching controversial elements of scientific theory. The Santorum amendment passed the Senate by a vote of 98 to 1 and was included as report language in the final version of H.R. 1, which was signed by the president. Specifically, the H.R. 1 Conference Report states:

> The Conferees recognize that a quality science education should prepare students to distinguish the data and testable theories of science from religious or philosophical claims that are made in the name of science. Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society.

Thus, the Santorum language is now part of the law. The Santorum language clarifies that public school students are entitled to learn that there are differing scientific views on issues such as biological evolution.

H.R. 1 calls for the enactment of state standards in the field of science. It's important that the implementation of these science standards not be used to censor debate on controversial issues in science, including Darwin's theory of evolution. Science is neither religion nor philosophy. Many people may draw religious or philosophical implications from science, but those implications are best drawn outside the science classroom. Students should be allowed to hear the scientific arguments on more than one side of a controversial topic. Censorship of opposing points of view retards true scholarship and prevents students from developing their critical thinking skills.

The text of the Santorum language in the H.R. 1 Conference Report and comments from members of House and Senate are enclosed for your background information. We hope this information will be help to you in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Rep. John A. Boehner
Chairman, House Education and
Workforce Committee

Rep. Steve Chabot
Chairman, House
Constitution Subcommittee

Congressional Conferees Language on Controversies Such as Evolution (Revised "Santorum Amendment"):
2001-107th Congress-1st Session-House of Representatives Report-107 334 *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 Conference Report* to accompany H.R. 1

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Statement by Senator Santorum Upon the Passage of the Education Act 2001:
Congressional Record: December 18, 2001 (Senate)
Page *S13365-S13422*

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I am very gratified that the House and Senate conferees included in the conference report of the elementary and secondary education bill the language of a resolution I introduced during the earlier Senate debate. That resolution concerned the teaching of controversies in science. It was adopted 91-8 by the Senate. By passing it we were showing our desire that students studying controversial issues in science, such as biological evolution, should be allowed to learn about competing scientific interpretations of evidence. As a result of our vote today that position is about to become a position of the Congress as a whole.

When the Senate bill was first under discussion in this body, I referenced an excellent Utah Law Review article, Volume 2000, Number 1, by David K. DeWolf, Stephen C. Meyer and Mark Edward DeForrest. The authors demonstrate that teachers have a constitutional right to teach, and students to learn, about scientific controversies, so long as the discussion is about science, not religion or philosophy. As the education bill report language makes clear, it is not proper in the science classrooms of our public schools to teach either religion or philosophy. But also, it says, just because some think that contending scientific theories may have implications for religion or philosophy, that is no reason to ignore or trivialize the scientific issues embodied in those theories. After all, there are enormous religious and philosophical questions implied by much of what science does, especially these days. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that the scientific evidence behind them is examined in science classrooms. Efforts to shut down scientific debates, as such, only serve to thwart the true purposes of education, science and law. There is a question here of academic freedom, freedom to learn, as well as to teach. The debate over origins is an excellent example. Just as has happened in other subjects in the history of science, a number of scholars are now raising scientific challenges to the usual Darwinian account of the origins of life. Some scholars have proposed such alternative theories as intelligent design. In the Utah law review article the authors state, ". . . The time has come for school boards to resist threats of litigation from those who would censor teachers, who teach the scientific controversy over origins, and to defend their efforts to expand student access to evidence and information about this timely and

compelling controversy."

The public supports the position we are taking today. For instance, national opinion surveys showÑto use the origins issue againÑthat Americans overwhelmingly desire to have students learn the scientific arguments against, as well as for, Darwin's theory. A recent Zogby International poll shows the preference on this as 71 percent to 15 percent, with 14 percent undecided. The goal is academic excellence, not dogmatism. It is most timely, and gratifying, that Congress is acknowledging and supporting this objective.

Speech of Honorable Thomas E. Petri of Wisconsin in the House of Representatives.
Thursday, December 13, 2001
Page E2330

Additionally, this conference report makes a strong statement that, where Darwinian evolutionary theory or other controversial scientific topics are taught, students should be exposed to multiple viewpoints. Too often, students are taught only one theory where evolution is concerned, and this language gives support to those at the local and state level who uphold the value of intellectual freedom in the teaching of science. This statement is especially important to make now because H.R.1 requires all students eventually to be tested in science on a regular basis as a condition of aid.