

Hobby: Texas has become a national laughingstock

Bill Hobby, SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

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Texas, once the Lone Star State, first became the Let's Secede State (courtesy of Gov. Rick Perry), and is now the Laughingstock State (thanks to the State Board of Education). Once a two-party state, Texas has become a tea party state.

What does it tell you that Debra Medina was showing close to 30 percent in Republican primary polls and dropped to 18 percent when she said she wasn't sure whether President George W. Bush bombed New York on 9/11? And Bush was a Republican president.

Take the most recent episode brought to us by the State Board of Education. Board members want to edit history books by expunging the names of Hispanics who helped Texas become free from Mexico. Lorenzo de Zavala, born in Mexico in 1788, helped draft the constitution of the Republic of Texas and was its interim vice president. The Texas Archives building across from the Capitol is named for him.

Have the folks who want to edit Texas history to suit their lily-white selves ever heard of him? Apparently not.

Even before the Texas history fiasco, some board members had decided that they were better scientists than Charles Darwin. Seems they're not real happy about evolution.

The board's chief biologist is ex-Chairman Don McLeroy, who will have to conduct his scientific investigations elsewhere next year. He was defeated in the Republican primary by Tom Ratliff. On his campaign Web site, Ratliff explained some differences between himself and McLeroy: "I believe God created the Heavens and the Earth millions and millions of years ago. I do not believe, as my opponent does, that the Earth is a mere few thousand years old, nor do I believe, as my opponent does, that dinosaurs and mankind lived at the same time."

I'm like the ill-informed gentleman in South Carolina who said, "Keep your government hands off my Medicare!" I just want them to keep their hands off of my textbooks.

If we're lucky, the State Board of Education may itself be evolving. The problem is that evolution means change.

Is the theory of evolution itself evolving?

Of course. Noted paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould showed that evolution does not proceed at a steady pace, but in fits and starts.

Is physics evolving? You bet.

Newtonian physics describes our everyday world. But when telescopes exposed us to infinite space and time, Albert Einstein developed the theory of relativity. When electronics exposed us to subatomic worlds, Niels Bohr, Paul Dirac, Werner Heisenberg, Max Planck and others developed the field of quantum mechanics. Do all of those fields of physics fit together neatly? No. Physicists are trying to develop a Grand Unified Theory. They haven't found it yet. Maybe there isn't one.

Is astronomy evolving? At galactic speed.

Ptolemy taught us that the Sun went around the Earth. But then Copernicus and Galileo said, "No, it's the other way around."

Astronomers can account for less than 20 percent of the matter necessary to hold the universe together — if we

have the laws of gravity and physics right. Dark energy and dark matter, whatever they may be, are needed to balance the equations.

The only fields of study that don't evolve are those not important enough to think about. Central to the theory of evolution is the mutant gene that causes the species to evolve, for better or worse. And the mutant gene that made the GOP evolve from the party of Eisenhower to the party of Rush Limbaugh and the wackos evolve from Birchers to Birthers is loose in Texas. But help is on the way. Scientists will soon isolate that gene. Then the condition can be treated. In the meantime, those of us who believe the Earth is round, that it goes around the sun and that President Barack Obama was born in Hawaii will try to avoid the conservative thought police.

Hobby, a Democrat, served as lieutenant governor of Texas from 1973 to 1991.

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