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Scientists Endorse Candidate Over Teaching of Evolution

By [CORNELIA DEAN](#)

In an unusual foray into electoral politics, 75 science professors at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland have signed a letter endorsing a candidate for the [Ohio](#) Board of Education.

The professors' favored candidate is Tom Sawyer, a former congressman and onetime mayor of Akron. They hope Mr. Sawyer, a Democrat, will oust Deborah Owens Fink, a leading advocate of curriculum standards that encourage students to challenge the theory of evolution.

Elsewhere in Ohio, scientists have also been campaigning for candidates who support the teaching of evolution and have recruited at least one biologist from out of state to help.

Lawrence M. Krauss, a physicist at Case Western Reserve who organized the circulation of the letter, said almost 90 percent of the science faculty on campus this semester had signed it. The signers are anthropologists, biologists, chemists, geologists, physicists and psychologists.

The letter says Dr. Owens Fink has "attempted to cast controversy on biological evolution in favor of an ill-defined notion called Intelligent Design that courts have ruled is religion, not science."

In an interview, Dr. Krauss said, "This is not some group of fringe scientists or however they are being portrayed by the creationist community," adding, "This is the entire scientific community, and I don't know of any other precedent for almost the entire faculty at an institution" making such a statement.

But Dr. Owens Fink, a professor of marketing at the University of Akron, said the curriculum standards she supported did not advocate teaching intelligent design, an ideological cousin of creationism. Rather, she said, they urge students to subject evolution to critical analysis, something she said scientists should endorse. She said the idea that there was a scientific consensus on evolution was "laughable."

Although researchers may argue about its details, the theory of evolution is the foundation for modern biology, and there is no credible scientific challenge to it as an explanation for the diversity and complexity of life on earth. In recent years, with creationist challenges to the teaching of evolution erupting in school districts around the country, groups like the [National Academy of Sciences](#), perhaps the nation's pre-eminent scientific organization, have repeatedly made this point.

But the academy's opinion does not matter to Dr. Owens Fink, who said the letter was probably right to say she had dismissed it as "a group of so-called scientists."

"I may have said that, yeah," she said.

She would not describe her views of Darwin and his theory, saying, "This isn't about my beliefs."

School board elections in Ohio are nonpartisan, but Dr. Owens Fink said she was a registered Republican. Her opponent, Mr. Sawyer, was urged to run for the Seventh District Board of Education seat by a new organization, Help Ohio Public Education, founded by Dr. Krauss and his colleague Patricia Princehouse, a biologist and historian of science, and Steve Rissing, a biologist at [Ohio State University](#).

At the group's invitation, Kenneth R. Miller, a biologist at [Brown University](#), will be in Ohio today through the weekend campaigning for other school board candidates who support the teaching of evolution. Dr. Miller, an author of a widely used biology textbook, was a crucial witness in the recent lawsuit in Dover, Pa., over intelligent design. The judge in that case ruled that it was a religious doctrine that had no place in a public school curriculum.

After that decision, Dr. Owens Fink said, the Ohio board abandoned curriculum standards that mandated a critical look at evolution, a decision she said she regretted. "Some people would rather just fold," she said.

But Dr. Miller said it was a good call, adding, "We have to make sure these good choices get ratified at the ballot box."

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