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Cover: Evolutionary biologists have struggled for more than a century to explain the origins of whales. A new molecular technique adds weight to the idea that hippopotamuses hold the key to cetacean ancestry. **Page 296** (Photo: Bob Couey, © Sea World)

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Letters

A whirlwind over Kansas

Thank you for the report on the Kansas Board of Education censoring evolution ("Kansas cuts evolution from curriculum," SN: 8/21/99, p. 117). In 1997, Illinois had a new set of educational standards ready to be used as the basis for its tests for comparing schools. The state superintendent of schools decided to appoint an External Review Committee, including the executive secretary of the Illinois Christian Coalition and other creationists, to work it over. They butchered a lot of areas and in the sciences, removed every mention of evolution. Many of us protested, but nothing changed, and it still hasn't. So Kansas is 2 years behind the times in the creationist efforts.

I feel as sorry for Kansas as for Illinois.

*Jack Bennett
DeKalb, Ill.*

I was disappointed to see *SCIENCE NEWS* take the usual biased approach to the Kansas Board of Education's recent vote on testing requirements, especially the repeti-

tion of such comments as Kevin Padian's reference to evolution as "the central organizing theory of biology." Almost all biological studies can be carried out without reference to evolution, and its central place is due in large part to authoritarian fiat, not practical or intellectual necessity. Many articles in *SCIENCE NEWS* related to biology have no reference to evolutionary factors, and rightly so.

*David Bump
Flushing, Mich.*

That the Kansas Board of Education was able to chalk up a victory for the antievolution forces is not really surprising. The general public is, at best, only vaguely aware of all that evolution entails. They might be cognizant of prehistoric wonders like the dinosaurs, but that evolution is a continuing process that explains a great deal in our current natural and manufactured world is downplayed in the press. Evolutionary events are not described in evolutionary terms, and *SCIENCE NEWS* is just as guilty as other media outlets. It seems that the concept of evolution and the sundry conjugated forms of the verb "to evolve" are used only

when some new fossil is announced or the evolution controversy itself is being discussed.

*J. Richard Shenkel
Covington, La.*

One of the many issues with the Kansas decision is the confusion of faith with science. Faith and religious beliefs are, by definition, dogmatic and not subject to scientific challenge. Scientific theories, on the other hand, are only valid until someone finds an example that refutes them. Creationism is not a scientific theory. What is even more disturbing about the Kansas decision is that it is part of a trend that is orchestrated by a well organized, purposeful movement.

*Alfred Kausel
Clearwater, Fla.*

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