Creationism law may be suspended

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BATON ROUGE — Louisiana's embattled scientific creationism law may be suspended by the 1982 Legislature with the support of its lead author, Sen. Bill Keith, D-Mooringsport.

The suspension would be temporary, until the federal courts rule on the constitutionality of the statute, Keith said at a news conference Wednesday.

Keith and other proponents of the law, which requires that the Bible-based creationism theory be taught alongside the Darwinian theory of evolution in Louisiana public schools, held the news conference in the office of Attorney General William J. Guste Jr. to introduce the special counsel being retained to handle the state's case in defense of the law.

Keith said he is not worried by efforts to repeal the law. Two House members, Reps. Terry Gee, R-Algiers, and Quentin Dastugue, D-Metairie, prefiled a bill Tuesday that would repeal the act passed by the 1981 Legislature.

Keith said he would agree to a suspension of the law while it is being contested in court, Keith said, "Yes, I think we may even recommend that, but that is something we will have to work out in the days ahead" with the lawyers handling the case.

Assistant Attorney General Ellis Magee said, "We want to get this set up as soon as possible before any public funds are spent on it." Those who have suggested that the Legislature pass a resolution temporarily suspending the law have argued that it should be done so the state will not buy textbooks and other materials it would have no use for if the law is overturned, as was a similar one in Arkansas.

Keith said he thinks the Louisiana law will fare better in court than the Arkansas one did, partly because of the support from the attorney general and the governor here. "I'm confident that when this law receives an adequate defense, it will survive all the challenges of the courts," Keith said.