House votes down creationism repeal

By ALLAN PURSNELL
Capitol news bureau

That old-time religion prevailed Monday in the House, which voted 61-26 against repealing Louisiana's 3-year-old law requiring public schools that teach evolution to teach scientific creationism.

Rep. Avery Alexander, a part-time minister from New Orleans, called evolution worse than Nazism and communism. He spoke after the vote, because the House moved to cut off debate before opponents of repeal had a chance to present their side. "Evolution teaches that man came from some lower animal and everything we know and see came about randomly — no God — no creator," said Alexander. He said such teachings are against the Bible.

"It is intellectually unsound," said Rep. Alphonse Jackson, D-Shreveport, speaking against creationism. "I don't see any reason to keep on the books a law we know is unconstitutional, that will cost us a half a million dollars and will seriously stifle academic freedom," said Jackson.

The creation science law was approved by the Legislature in 1981, sponsored by former Sen. Bill Keith, D-Shreveport, who was defeated in his re-election bid. The law has been tied up in the courts ever since. The law requires that creationism science be taught in public schools that teach evolution.

A similar law in Arkansas was struck down by the courts as an unconstitutional violation of the separation of church and state.

Scientific creationism is the belief that man was created in his present form by a supreme being and did not evolve from lower life forms.

Jackson said it is going to cost the state millions of dollars to fight a losing battle to defend creationism in the courts and millions more to buy textbooks that conform to creation science teachings.

Rep. Quentin Dastugue, D-Metairie, said rejection of the repeal bill would once again make Louisiana the laughingstock of the nation.

The House rejected 72-17 an amendment by Rep. John Travis, D-Jackson, that would have outlawed the teaching of both creationism and evolution in public schools. Travis said he saw nothing wrong with leaving things as they are, but if there was a repeal, he said it would only be fair to ban the teaching of both.

"Historically we have had a doctrine of separation of church and state," said Jackson. "If we continue with this unworkable law, we will not have freedom of religion. Creationism is a religion. It's a peculiar, narrow religion . . . ," said Jackson.

The bill, SB269 by Sen. Sydney Nelson, D-Shreveport, narrowly passed the Senate.