Panel Says No To Creationism Law

By Advertiser Capitol Bureau

Baton Rouge — Lafayette’s representatives on the House Education Committee split over whether the state’s creationism law should be put into effect — but the committee chairman broke the tie and voted for repealing the law.

With Lafayette Rep. Kathleen Blanco voting for the repeal and Rep. Mike Thompson voting against it, the committee tied 7-7. Committee chairman Jimmy Long of Natchitoches, in a move that surprised some on both sides, voted in favor of the repeal which sent the bill to the House floor for debate.

The committee heard arguments from lawmakers on how the state could not afford to put the state creationism law into effect and how it probably would be ruled unconstitutional in an expensive court case now under way. Killing the law that was adopted in 1981 would save the state expenses for new books and teacher training, as well as the lawsuit filed to block the law.

Is It A Violation?

Proponents of keeping creationism contested arguments that it is a violation of the separation of church and state by saying the law forbids teaching of creationism in religious terms. Instead, the law calls for the teaching of the scientific aspects of creationism with no mention of the creator.

That argument lost creationism (Continued on Page 5, Col. 1)
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proponents some of their support including Blanco.

"Before today, I was inclined to support creationism," she told the committee. "I don’t mind God getting into the classroom through the back door.

"I was told to vote for creationism to bring God into education but after hearing the arguments for and against the way it is to be taught in Louisiana schools, I am opposed to it."

Maybe Later

Blanco said if further study makes creationism more acceptable, it probably will be taught in all schools. "When it becomes accepted by the scientific community, it will be included in textbooks," she said.

In the meantime the way evolution is taught in schools allows for interpretation. "The theory of evolution allows to view God as a master planner who lays a foundation for everything to develop," she said.

Thompson said he voted against the repeal because "we passed a law. There were reasons for passing the law at the time. Those reasons have not changed."

Thompson said he believes the state should go ahead with its defense of the law and "let the courts decide."

"I am for presentation of all scientific theory. I’m not the one to judge which one has more validity but evolution is just a theory too — it’s not a fact," he said.

Thompson said the law does not have religious overtones and "I’m somewhat surprised that people who have strong religious views — sometimes called fundamentalists, would be in support of a measure that teaches a theory of creation as a scientific theory without reference to religion. But that’s the only way it can be presented in public schools and maintain separation of church and state."

"My vote is not predicated on any connection with religion," Thompson said.