

Conservatives win vote on school curriculum: Texas standards influence publishing nationwide

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In a battle over the content of public school textbooks that is widely thought to have national implications, religious conservatives on the Texas Board of Education succeeded in adopting curriculum guidelines that reflect their views on U.S. history and economics.

Board members, who are elected to their posts, also rejected a motion by a Democrat member that would have required students to study why the Founding Fathers “protected religious freedom in America by barring government from promoting or disfavoring any particular religion over all others.” On that vote, seven social conservatives on the board were joined by three moderate Republicans in voting down the Democrats—three Latinos and two blacks.

The March 12 final vote on a package of amendments to the guidelines was 11 to 4. Board members will return to the state capital in May for a final vote, but few changes are expected.

Incumbent board member Don McLeroy, a creationist and outspoken critic of the separation of church and state, lost his seat March 2 in a Republican primary to Thomas Ratcliff, a legislative consultant. Ratcliff, considered a moderate, had criticized on his Web site the practice of some board members who, he said, “search far and wide to find ‘experts’ that also support their political agendas.” In his campaign, McLeroy warned: “Our nation is falling under the sway of the ideas of the far left.”

In another change adopted by the board, the word “capitalism” was replaced throughout the guidelines with the term “free-enterprise system” because, one member said, the former word has a negative connotation.

Because Texas is one of the largest purchasers of textbooks, its curriculum guidelines influence what publishers decide to include in their books. But a *New York Times* article on March 12 questioned the extent of this impact, saying that in the digital age the Texas influence “has been diminished as technological advances have made it possible for publishers to tailor books to individual states.”

In January and at the three-day March meeting, the board adopted at least 160 amendments to the 120-page curriculum standards for students up to the 12th grade.

Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, issued a statement calling the curriculum adoption process “seriously broken, with politics and personal agendas dominating just about every decision.”

Board members this year “continued to demand that students learn about ‘American exceptionalism,’” she wrote in a news release. References to Thomas Jefferson and to “Enlightenment ideas” were removed from the guidelines.

Jonathan Saenz, speaking for the conservative Liberty Institute, said he was pleased with the changes the board made. “Thus far, the liberal efforts to infiltrate, indoctrinate and saturate our social studies with narrow ideology have failed,” Saenz said, according to the *Dallas Morning News*.