

TEXAS SPA ACTION ALERT
January 2009

To: NCJW Texas State Public Affairs Action Network
From: Marlene Cohen and Janet Neuenschwander, Co-Chairs

Important Dates

111th Congress Convened – January 6, 2009, Noon EST

81st Regular Session of Texas Legislature Convened – January 13, 2009

Inauguration of 44th President – January 20, 2009; Oath at Noon EST

Deadline to make hotel reservations for Day on the Hill – January 25, 2009

Deadline to register for Day on the Hill – February 6, 2009

**Make your plans NOW for Day on the Hill in Austin on
February 16 – 17, 2009.**

Day on the Hill will start at 1:20 p.m. (registration begins at 12:45 p.m.) on Monday, February 16. Monday afternoon, experts in the areas of children's health; women's health; comprehensive sex education; early childhood education, and the State Board of Education will educate, inform, and empower us to be effective advocates. Speakers are **Anne Dunkleberg** – Texas CHIP Coalition for healthy babies and children; **Kara Johnson** – Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition; **Kathy Miller** – Texas Freedom Network (SBOE); and **Lesley Ramsey** – Texas Association of Planned Parenthood Affiliates;

Monday evening, enjoy a reception and dinner at the hotel. The program will feature **The Honorable Mark Strama** and award presentations to: **Julie Lowenberg** and **Ellen Sable** (immediate past Texas SPAs), Belief in Action; **Kathy Miller**, Woman Who Dared; and **The Honorable Mark Strama**, Texas Trailblazer.

Bright and early Tuesday morning, we will have one more questions and answers session and then it's off to visit our state legislators. We will be finished mid-afternoon on Tuesday.

Deadline to register is **February 6, 2009**. Cost, including Monday evening's dinner, is \$70. Registration form has costs for partial attendance.

Hotel room reservations must be made directly with the Doubletree Guest Suites Austin (303 West 15th Street) at 512.478.7000. Cut-off date to obtain rate and guaranteed room availability is **January 25, 2009**. Further information can be found on the registration form.

Registration form is attached. You may also register online at www.ncjwdallas.org.

"Strengths and weaknesses" nixed in Texas

The National Center for Science Education (NCSE)

Full article at: <http://ncseweb.org/news/2008/12/strengths-weaknesses-nixed-texas-003446>

The third draft of Texas's science standards is available — and the creationist catchphrase "strengths and weaknesses" is absent. The **current standards** (PDF) for high school biology include a requirement that reads, "The student is expected to analyze, review, and critique scientific explanations, including hypotheses and theories, as to their strengths and weaknesses using scientific evidence and information." In 2003, the "strengths and weaknesses" language was selectively applied by members of the board attempting to dilute the treatment of evolution in the biology textbooks then under consideration, and so it was clear that the "strengths and weaknesses" language would be a matter of contention when the standards were next revised.

The **first draft** (PDF) of the revised standards replaced the "strengths and weaknesses" language with "The student is expected to analyze and evaluate scientific explanations using empirical evidence, logical reasoning, and experimental and observational testing."

Nevertheless, when the Texas board of education began to hear testimony about the new standards on November 19, 2008, it was presented not with the first draft but with a **second draft** (PDF), in which the "strengths and weaknesses" language was replaced with a variant... At the meeting, defenders of the integrity of science education argued that "strengths and limitations" was no improvement over "strengths and weaknesses." The **third draft** (PDF) reverts to the first draft's "analyze and evaluate" language.

In its discussion of the nature of science, the third draft is similar but not identical to the first draft. According to the first draft, "Science uses observational evidence to make predictions of natural phenomena and to construct testable explanations. If ideas are based upon purported forces outside of nature, they cannot be tested using scientific methods." The third draft reads, "Science, as defined by the National Academy of Sciences, is the 'use of evidence to construct testable explanations and predictions of natural phenomena, as well as the knowledge generated through this process.' ... Students should know that some questions are outside the realm of science because they deal with phenomena that are not scientifically testable."

... the third draft will be considered by the state board of education at its January 21-23, 2009, meeting, with a public hearing regarding the proposed revisions scheduled for January 21, 2009. The January meeting will presumably constitute the first reading of the new standards, with a period for further public comment following; the second reading and final vote are expected, but not guaranteed, to occur at the board's March 26-27, 2009, meeting. The stakes are high: the standards will determine what is taught in Texas's public school science classrooms and the content of the biology textbooks approved for use in the state for the next ten years....

While this sounds promising, there is a warning – the Board is not required to use the final draft. Last year, the Board rejected a teacher-suggested language arts curriculum in favor of another that some board members have said they had only an hour to read before voting on it.

Members of the Greater Dallas Section traveled to the November hearing and provided testimony supporting sound science. Make plans to attend the January hearing or submit written testimony. There is strength in numbers. Even if the Board ultimately rejects sound science, they will know that we know what they are doing.

News From Coalition Partners

Learn More about Early Childhood Education

Last month, the Pre-k Now Conference held a video conference in Texas and throughout the country. Texas had more sites than ever this year with 37! Several NCJW members attended.

You can now access the archive video of the Texas-specific broadcast. To view the conference, please click one of the links below:

- **Windows Media 100/300 kbps**
http://video.vdat.com/playmedia_embed2.asp?sid=97718&aid=99092
- **Real Player 100/300 kbps**
http://video.vdat.com/playmedia_embed2.asp?sid=97719&aid=99093
- **QuickTime 300 kbps :**
http://video.vdat.com/playmedia_embed2.asp?sid=97896&aid=99270

The Texas Finish Line Campaign

The Finish Line Campaign is a voice for all those who want Texas to cross the Finish Line and assure all Texas children have access to affordable comprehensive health coverage. To succeed, we need your help. If providing access to affordable children's health coverage is important to you, please go to www.TXFinishLine.org and sign-on to the statewide campaign. By all of you joining we can demonstrate the overwhelming public support for children's health coverage. You will also become an integral arm of the campaign, getting action alerts during key moments and celebrating in our successes.

Healthy children benefit us all, as demonstrated by the business community who remain strongly behind providing access to affordable health coverage to all children. We hope you too will join us in taking Texas across the Finish Line.

Sign-on to the Campaign at www.TXfinishline.org

Please help us reach our goal of 2,000 supporters in the next two months by passing this email on to your networks.

The SPA has signed on for Texas NCJW. We encourage you and your Sections to also sign on.

Texans Care for Kids

Register For Voices For Change Day!

We are co-sponsoring the 2009 Voices for Change Day (formerly Children's Advocacy Day) on February 4th. Hosted by Texans Care For Children, the Texas Network of Youth Services, and Children At Risk, this biennial event brings advocates from all over Texas to the Capitol for a free day of training, networking, and advocacy. This year, advocates will be asking state leaders to sign a pledge to Put Kids First for the future of Texas.

Although the event is free, you must pre-register by Jan. 16, 2009 to reserve your space for the free lunch, meetings with state officials, advocacy training, and more. Please register today at: http://www.texanscareforchildren.org/files/Registration_Flyer.pdf

If you are unable to attend, there will be a call in day on February 3rd. Details to follow.

News from National

[NCJW Applauds Passage of Equal Pay Bills by the House](#)

NCJW welcomes passage of two equal pay bills by the House of Representatives. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act make strides in addressing the persistent inequity facing women in the workplace.

These bills were among the unfinished business of the last congress. They were the first substantive legislation taken up in the House of Representatives. The Senate must act quickly to approve these bills and send them on to our new President who has pledged to sign both into law.

[NCJW Denounces New HHS Rule as Attack on Women, Urges Repeal](#)

On December 19, 2008, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published a new regulation that claims to implement three federal laws giving health providers the right to refuse to perform, aid in, or learn about abortions or sterilization procedures. But, the HHS regulation is not limited to these procedures. In reality, this regulation will impact patients' access to a wide range of basic health services and information, including reproductive health services, by allowing individuals to refuse to be involved in any medical procedure, referral, or even the provision of information to patients if they deem it morally objectionable. The regulation is scheduled to go into effect on January 18, 2009.

NCJW urges President-elect Obama and his administration to act quickly upon taking office on January 20 to undo the damage inflicted by this 11th hour attempt to impose the most restrictive regime possible on the medical community and those it serves. The rule must be reversed as soon as possible.

To learn more about these issues and to take action, go to www.ncjw.org.

News from Washington, DC

Incoming Administration Reviewing Bush Regulations

With a new administration in Washington, regulations that were put into place during the past eight years are being reviewed. Some decisions that will be made in the days ahead include: whether to cut funding for sexual abstinence programs; whether to increase funding for comprehensive sex education programs that include discussion of birth control; whether to allow federal health plans to pay for abortions; and whether to overturn regulations such as one that makes fetuses eligible for health-care coverage under the Children's Health Insurance Program. Women's health advocates are also pushing for a change in rules that would lower the cost of birth control at college health clinics.

As one of his first actions, Mr. Obama is likely to issue an executive order lifting President George W. Bush's restrictions on funding for research using embryonic stem cells, a move with bipartisan support.

Women's health advocates also expect early action on the "global gag rule," which bars foreign organizations from using their own money for abortion services or advocacy if they accept U.S. aid for family planning. This policy was instituted by President Ronald Reagan, immediately overturned by President Bill Clinton, and then reinstated by Mr. Bush.

Mr. Obama is also expected to restore federal funding for family planning to the United Nations Population Fund soon after taking office. This policy also has gone back and forth with control of the White House, with Republicans arguing that the U.N. agency supports coercive abortions because of its work in China with its one-child policy, and Democrats saying that the agency doesn't.