

## **Hot Topics**

### **TV Guestpert Talking Points**

**Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.**

- Osama Bin Busy
- Chimps R Us: And We are All Getting Warmer
- Can 2000 Years of Moral Thought Be Wrong?
- The First Amendment First to Go
- God as Darwin in Disguise
- Religion and Government: A Dangerous Brew
- Conservatives Gone Wild
- The War on Reason: Faith-based Science
- New Tropical Destination: the North Pole!
- Evolution vs. Intelligent Design
- Abortion

## Hot Topic: "Osama Bin Busy"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Let's be crystal clear about one point that President Bush consistently lies about: al Qaeda was not in Iraq prior to our invasion; al Qaeda was not influencing Saddam Hussein, and Iraq had nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with the attacks of 9/11. That is the unambiguous conclusion from every National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), and of the Iraq Study Group. But Bush continues to lie.
- In his deception of the American people, Bush cannot however obscure the saddest fact: the one man most responsible for 9/11 is still at large, Osama bin Laden, is making videos like a Spielberg protégé.
- Worse, as a direct consequence of our invasion, al Qaeda has now "reconstituted its core structure along the Pakistani border and may now be a stronger and more resilient organization today than it appeared a year ago" according to the most recent NIE.
- Worse still, as we divert a half-trillion dollars to a hopeless war, we ignore our most urgent national security threats. Today nearly 90% of all cargo entering the U.S. remains uninspected. Our food supply is completely vulnerable. Our water is unprotected, as are our nuclear power plants. We remain unprepared for biological or chemical attacks. All these years later, our emergency response teams still don't have a coordinated means of communicating. We've diverted all of our resources from our most urgent needs.
- The one indisputable result of our invasion of Iraq is that we are now more vulnerable than we have ever been. Bush's monomaniac and blind effort to "stay the course" is now our greatest threat to national security.
- In a statement dripping with unintended irony, in September 2006, Bush accused the Democrats of cherry picking pieces of the then-recently declassified NIE report "for partisan political gain...to mislead the American people and justify their policy of withdrawal from Iraq." Cherry picking? How about cherry picking faulty intelligence, ignoring glaring inconsistencies and persecuting those in disagreement as the Cheney Gang marched us off to war?
- While the majority of Americans now realize we were duped into this war by a dishonest administration, few ask why or how this came about. The answer lies in the Bush Administration's faith-based approach to reality. When you have a hotline to heaven, you must be right. The Bush Administration has declared a war

on reason, demonstrating a consistent antipathy to science and logic. One result is the Iraq war.

- Iraq is a religious war, because Bush believes he is carrying out god's mandate in executing the war. He has reportedly said that "I believe God wants me to be president." If accurate, and multiple sources over time have reported similar quotes, those are perhaps the most frightening words ever spoken in American history.
- In response to 9/11, Bush claimed a mandate "to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil... We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of this great nation." That of course leaves him free to define evil, all while exporting death. But with a divine mandate, that is justifiable.
- We need to reclaim logic in our foreign policy, moving away from faith-based policy-making. The world will be a safer place. And let's catch bin Laden.

**Related Media:**

New bin Laden video surfaces

[http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/11/binladen.video/index.html?eref=rss\\_topstories](http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/11/binladen.video/index.html?eref=rss_topstories)

## Hot Topic: "Chimps R Us: And We are All Getting Warmer"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, science, government, national politics, ethics, morality, democracy, science policy, global warming, biodiversity, deforestation, pollution

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- We've known for a long time that the genetic material found in chimps differs from human DNA by only 1.23%.
- Now, a team led by Iowa State University anthropology professor Jill Pruett has documented that chimps make weapons to kill prey.
- Tool use is well documented in the animal kingdom, but this is the first evidence of tool use in the context of hunting.
- The perceived gap between humans and other primates continues to narrow. From this, we can learn to be more humble about humanity's role on earth; shedding our hubris, we can then tackle issues like global warming caused by mankind's arrogant disregard for the environment.
- A change in attitude is exactly what we need, and what Save Our Selves, and other conscientious citizens, are promoting. But we will only be successful if we see a significant shift in how people view themselves in relationship to other animals and the resources that sustain us.
- Chimps hunting with homemade spears offer to us a perfect reminder of our humble roots, and our close ancestry with not only primates, but all living beings. Instead of debating the absurd idea of Intelligent Design, we should be discussing how best to integrate human activity in a way that is compatible with our long-term presence here on earth.
- Humans are special, not because we are made in god's image, and commanded by the Bible to rule over the earth, but because we have the amazing ability to choose a future in which we thrive and develop in a just society while coexisting with a healthy natural world. If we fail to seize our opportunity to create such a future, we will be no more than bacteria with library cards.
- The choice is in our hands, not god's. We are special if we choose to be, if we ourselves decide to use our big brains to manage wisely our relationships with one another and with our environment.

## Hot Topic: "Can 2000 Years of Moral Thought Be Wrong?"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- After a 2000 year run, we know religious morality is deeply flawed.
- Religious morality does not encourage good behavior as a means of advancing our humanity, but instead is enforced with threats of eternal damnation.
- Religious morality has left us a legacy of war, poverty, disease, and environmental degradation
- Throughout the world, women are denied control over their reproductive destiny in the name of religion, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and despair.
- One billion people live on less than 1 dollar per day.
- About 1.2 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.
- 850 million people live with chronic hunger; 9 million die from hunger-related causes each year.
- 185 million people have died as a direct consequence of war in the last century.
- We pump billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year.
- We destroy millions of acres of pristine rainforest, and lose untold species to extinction.
- What we view as moral behavior - kindness, reciprocity, honesty, respect for others and for the resources that sustain us – are social norms evolved in the context of a highly social animal living in large groups; religion, however, has masked and corrupted these natural characteristics with a false morality that converts human benevolence and generosity into commodities that can be purchased with coupons for heaven.
- The sad state of our planet and lamentable condition of humanity are not inevitable.
- We cannot afford to wait another 2000 years to recognize that our current world-view is not sustainable; there is a better way.

- The first step on our road to survival: change our perspective of self, with more humble understanding of our evolutionary history and current place in the biosphere.
- Our problems originate in our hubris in imagining ourselves at the center of the universe, separate from and better than other animals; we are neither special nor inevitable.
- True morality arises from inherent characteristics embedded in human nature as a consequence of our sociality; we can return to our roots and recapture the good nature embedded in each of us, free from any religious influence

**Related Media:**

U.S. abortion policy closes clinics: some communities left without any health care, report says.  
Reuters, October 31, 2003

[CLICK HERE](#)

## Hot Topic: "First Amendment First to Go"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- The evangelical religious right continues to invade and pervert American politics.
- Let's be clear about one unambiguous point that simply cannot be disputed: the Constitution of the United States nowhere mentions God or Christianity. That is a fact.
- Yet religion now so dominates American life and has infiltrated our educational system so deeply that even basic facts about our government and history are now seen through the distorted lens of religion. Faith has triumphed over reason and fact.
- According to the "State of the First Amendment 2007" national survey released on September 12 by the First Amendment Center, we see the following frightening statistics:
  - 65% of Americans believe that the nation's founders intended the U.S. to be a Christian nation
  - 55% believe that the Constitution establishes a Christian nation.
  - 74% of Republicans endorse the notion of a constitutional provision for a Christian nation; 50% of Democrats and 47% of independent voters agree.
  - Just 56% believe that the freedom to worship as one chooses extends to all religious groups, regardless of how extreme, down 16 points from 72% in 2000.
  - What we see in these alarming numbers is a precipitous degradation of our basic freedoms, willingly ceded by Americans blinded by faith.
  - This perspective has real consequences. Faith-based reasoning is why we are now mired in Iraq. With faith, one is free to ignore facts; one can simply believe, and that is enough. One is free to fabricate as long as one believes. When your instructions come directly from god, why examine facts on the ground? The results of this approach are obvious, and catastrophic.
  - We can and must do better. We must return to the roots of our Founding Fathers, recapture reason as the basis for our foreign policy decisions, and recommit to secular laws creating domestic policies that can be sustained realistically.

- We are not a Christian nation; we are a nation of Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and secularists. We are a nation of laws and logic. Any move away from that foundation is a grave threat to our very existence. The marriage of theology and ideology is a dangerous union, inherently blind to reason.

**Related Media:**

“State of the First Amendment 2007” Survey Shows Americans’ Mix of Opinion on Fundamental Freedoms.  
PRNewswire-USNewsire, Washington, D.C. September 12, 2007

[CLICK HERE](#)

## Hot Topic: "God as Darwin in Disguise"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Attempts to reconcile religion and science are futile and unproductive. Science searches for mechanisms and the answer to “how” the universe functions. Religion seeks meaning and the answer to “why” the world is as we know it.
- Science and religion can never be brought under one roof without sacrificing intellectual honesty. The two seek different answers to separate questions using fundamentally and inherently incompatible methods. Nothing can bring the two together. Yet the effort to reconcile continues. The latest example is the idea put forth by Richard Colling at Olivet Nazarene University, who writes that god “cares enough about creation to harness even the forces of (Darwinian) randomness.” God used Darwin to implement his will!
- The bizarre logic behind this idea is that the facts of evolution do not “preclude” the existence of god. In fact evolution and natural selection do indeed preclude the existence of god, according to the bible itself. We are told in Genesis that all life, everything that ever existed on earth, was created in 6 days. Evolution proves that wrong. The fossil record proves that wrong. Evolution in a Petri dish proves that wrong.
- But let’s say that we just ignore Genesis and assume that god chose natural selection to execute his grand scheme. If so, he is weak, messy, and a poor planner. Not very god-like. Nothing could be further from a divine hand than the rag-tag, opportunistic, uncaring, undirected and random process of evolution.
- The fundamental randomness of evolution through natural selection creates a terminal problem for any hand of god. If god is all knowing, he knew everything from the beginning of the universe, including every animal that would ever exist. That would preclude any animals evolving from random processes, since if truly random god could not then have known about them beforehand, meaning he would not be all-knowing. Yet if he in fact did know about all animals past and future, then that is not evolution, which is random by definition. Natural selection and evolution are inherently incompatible with the existence of god. The two cannot coexist.
- But religion has taken such a stranglehold on American thought, that believers will go through extreme contortions to incorporate the indisputable facts of evolution into a belief system that is fully undermined by the mechanisms of natural selection.

- But even worse than the intellectual dishonesty of trying to accommodate evolution within a religious framework is the shameless effort to deny the reality and validity of evolution. Evolution is the most thoroughly tested, documented, proven scientific fact ever put forth. The fact of evolution is as certain as the rising sun. Yet even today, in 2007, we hear from ministers and preachers telling us that evolution is “scientifically unverifiable.” Nothing could be further from the raw truth. Evolution is a proven reality no less than the fact that atoms are a building block of nature. To debate evolution is to question that the earth is round, or that DNA is the genetic code. Debating the fact of evolution is absurd.
- Animosity toward evolution, rather than abating in the face of greater human knowledge, is being further attacked in an ocean of ignorance. The new Creation Museum in Kentucky proudly states its purpose as countering “evolutionary natural history museums that a turn countless minds against Christ and Scripture.”
- That we are still having this discussion is sad testament to the serious degradation of our public school system. We are failing to teach our population even the most basic aspects of elementary science, in an era where science and technology are ever more critical to our national security.
- Unless we conquer this growing threat of scientific illiteracy, our nation is doomed. We will become a second-rate nation behind in stem cell research, high energy physics, biology, and medicine. Our infrastructure will continue to crumble with no progress in materials science. We will be poorly equipped to fight the growing technological prowess of our adversaries. We must stop this ridiculous “debate” about evolution and get on with the business of protecting ourselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Related Media:**

Can God Love Darwin, Too?  
Sharon Begley  
Newsweek, September 17, 2007

## Hot Topic: "Religion and Government: A Dangerous Brew"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, science, government, national politics, ethics, morality, democracy, science policy, prayer in school, faith-based government initiatives

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- The religious right is now firmly established in power in all branches of government, and in the majority of state capitals. The result has real consequences in daily life:
- A women's right to choose her own reproductive destiny has never been more threatened.
- We deny funding for stem cell research and therapeutic cloning, which could cure horrible diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis, all because of misplaced religious fervor and scientific illiteracy.
- Support for the death penalty is as strong as ever, in spite of the fact that DNA evidence has exonerated 172 prisoners condemned on death row (so much for the sanctity of life!).
- The president of the United States advocates the teaching of Intelligent Design in public schools.
- Environmental policy is determined by faith rather than science; scientific reports that do not support religious policy are suppressed and scientists muzzled.
- Policies influenced by religion result in the United States walking away from the Rio treaty to protect biological diversity; and the U.S. rejecting the Kyoto treaty to address the problem of climate change, citing "scientific uncertainty" as the excuse for inaction.
- The biblical admonition in Genesis to "rule over" the earth leads to wanton disregard for the environment, viewing resource extraction as an inalienable right, ignoring the reality of climate change, supporting drilling in pristine wildlife preserves and encouraging mining on public land.
- The religious right seeks to implement laws that weaken protection for species, vulnerable habitat and wetlands, and that promote policies that accelerate deforestation.

- The principle foundation of separation of church and state is rapidly eroding, with government support for prayer in school, and teaching Bible school in public schools.
- The role of military chaplains has come under increased scrutiny due to a lawsuit that links Air Force Academy officials with efforts to target non-religious personnel for religious conversion, with the support of the right wing Evangelical Christian group, Focus on the Family.
- The religious right supports the display of the Ten Commandments and holiday religious scenes on government property, including in court house buildings and grounds.
- Religious influence extends deeply into U.S. foreign policy; reversing policy of the Clinton Administration, the U.S. again terminates funding for any overseas organization that even discusses abortion with its patients; as a consequence, thousands of women are denied access to facilities that provide family planning and reproductive health services, including cervical screening and childhood immunization.

**Related Media:**

Alito's note to Dobson debated

Pam Zubeck, The Gazette (Colorado Springs), March 1, 2006

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the news article (HTML)

## Hot Topic: "Conservatives Gone Wild"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Governor Perry of Texas recently said in a speech before the California Republican Party convention, "I've heard Al Gore talk about man-made global warming so much that I'm starting to think that his mouth is the leading source of all that supposedly deadly carbon dioxide."
- In that one statement Perry encapsulates the mean-spirited ignorance that has consumed the conservative base of the Republican Party. Mean-spirited because it is a snide personal attack with no value other than to diminish using grade-school put-downs appealing to our worst instincts. Ignorant because breathing does not yield a net increase in the global load of carbon dioxide. Plants and animals have been in equilibrium for emitting and absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> for hundreds of millions of years.
- Ignorant, too, because Perry says, "supposedly" deadly carbon dioxide, with the clear implication that climate change is not a real issue or potential threat. Well, he must then know more than 800 scientists from 166 countries who authored a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), all of whom unanimously concluded that climate change is real, beyond natural variations seen over that past 4.5 billion years, and caused by human activity. That report was reviewed by more than 2500 scientists worldwide. The conclusions are unambiguous.
- But apparently Perry and all of his conservative friends are now professional meteorologists with a greater understanding of climate cycles than the global community of climatologists. That is the only reasonable conclusion since these doubters have determined that those 800 scientists, and 2500 reviewers, are wrong.
- But since there is no factual basis on which to doubt the IPCC report, rejecting its solid conclusions means we are also free to question other well-established scientific facts, such as the existence of atoms, DNA as the genetic code, laws of gravity, relativity, or the existence of bacteria and viruses as pathogenic agents.
- We might as well go all the way and question whether the earth is truly a sphere rather than flat. At this stage in our understanding of climate change, questioning the role of "supposedly" detrimental carbon dioxide is no less silly than pondering the shape of the earth.

- With his recent statement, Perry has embodied the scourge of scientific illiteracy in our society. And such illiteracy has real and tragic consequences. We don't fund stem cell research, which could cure horrible diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, spinal cord injury, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes and cancer. We introduce new laws that reduce protection for protected species; we lower standards for air and water pollution; we open our parklands to mining and logging; we block the FDA from approving new drugs like Plan B because their application might offend the religious right.
- We do all of this because with faith-based reasoning, like that demonstrated by Perry, we are free to ignore facts that inconveniently undermine our preconceptions. We simply have to believe we are right; forget objective reality or the weight of solid evidence to the contrary. That warm embrace of ignorance, now so emblematic of the conservative religious right, is now the greatest threat to our national security.

**Related Media:**

Perry Goes on the Attack Against Democrats  
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/politics/5130618.html>  
Peggy Fikac  
Houston Chronicle  
September 12, 2007

## Hot Topic: "The War on Reason: Faith-based Science"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, science, government, national politics, ethics, morality, democracy, science policy, global warming, biodiversity, deforestation, pollution

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- No administration in modern times has been more hostile to science than the Bush White House.
- Houston, we have a problem. More than 60 prominent scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates, have signed a declaration stating “that the scope and scale of the manipulation, suppression, and misrepresentation of science by the Bush Administration is unprecedented.”
- More than 4,000 scientists, including 48 Nobel laureates and 127 members of the National Academy of Science, have signed a statement declaring, “Across a broad range of policy areas, the administration has undermined the quality and independence of the scientific advisory system and the morale of the government’s outstanding scientific personnel”
- In September, 2002, the administration removed a section on Climate Change from the EPA’s annual air pollution report, although that section had been an integral part of the report for the five preceding years.
- In June, 2003, the White House tried to change EPA’s draft Report on the Environment, hoping to delete reference to a National Academy of Science report concluding that human activity is contributing to climate change.
- The White House objected to EPA’s draft language, widely accepted in the scientific community, that “climate change has global consequences for human health and the environment.”
- The administration tried to suppress the use of a well-established 1000-year temperature record, instead substituting an analysis that supported the administration’s position.
- The White House Council on Environmental Quality censored, and then ceased publication of, a USDA brochure recommending steps that farmers could take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- After 10 years of study, and independent peer review by the National Academy of Science, a scientific team issued final findings on species management along the Missouri River, listing actions that were to take effect in 2003. But the Bush

Administration stepped in, inserted a new team, and revised the biological conclusions from the 10 year study, with conclusions suitable to the White House.

- The Bush Administration overruled a \$12 million science-based management plan for old-growth forest in eleven national parks; they did so with a “review team” consisting largely of non-scientists with no forestry expertise; plan changes included doubling or tripling the harvest and relaxing standards for cattle grazing.
- Tightening standards for lead pollution and poisoning were avoided by the administration by making last-minute changes to an expert panel, packing the committee with industry-friendly staff and dismissing world-renowned experts on lead.
- In an extraordinary move, the FDA disapproved over-the-counter sales of Plan B (a “morning after” contraceptive) by overriding the agency’s scientists; the GAO later concluded that the FDA “diverged sharply from usual agency procedures”
- The White House has attacked science so severely that even the states are fighting back. A coalition of 12 states sued the EPA to block the Bush Administration from relaxing key elements of the Clean Air Act.
- On December 21, 2005, EPA proposed air quality standards for fine particulate matter that were weaker than even the most generous proposed by the Clean Air Science Advisory Committee.
- On March 17, 2006, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals (D.C.) overturned the Bush Administration’s “routine maintenance” rule, which exempted 1000’s of air polluters from regulation.
- The White House is not satisfied with attacking clean air; they now have water in their crosshairs, taking actions that will virtually dismantle the Clean Water Act passed 30 years ago, and now considered one of the most successful environmental laws ever enacted.
- On February 16, 2006, the Bush White House proposed lowering drinking water quality standards for poor and rural communities

**Related Media:**

Administration Ignores Science in Proposing Standards for Particle Pollution  
U.S. PIRG, December 20, 2005

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the news article (HTML)

## Hot Topic: "New Tropical Destination: the North Pole!"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, ethics, morality, social norms, politics of morality, spirituality, science

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Canada, Russia Denmark and Norway are now jockeying for control of new shipping routes and mining opportunities opened up in the Arctic as a consequence of global warming, all while Bush and his conservative allies sit on the sidelines denying the reality of climate change.
- Canada recently sent warships to the Arctic to claim sovereignty. Russia for the first time since the end of the Cold War sent 12 of its strategic bombers flying to the Arctic; but if that did not make the point, a Russian submarine planted that nation's flag on the ocean floor directly under the North Pole.
- Why the sudden spate of territorial claims? The European Space Agency reported on September 15 that satellites now confirm that Arctic ice has shrunk to the lowest level on record. Polar ice now covers 25% less area than just three decades ago, and is one-third thinner. Melting ice opens up a sea lane and exposes a vast territory to exploitation of immense mineral wealth.
- Since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, mariners have searched for the so-called Northwest Passage, a viable route to join the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Arctic Archipelago. Since the first effort in 1576, all the expeditions ended in failure, disaster and tragedy. The waters and ice were simply too treacherous. But in spite of deadly obstacles, the search held tremendous allure because a sea route between Europe and Asia through the Arctic would be about 4500 miles shorter than the route through the Panama Canal.
- President Thomas Jefferson, never one to give up easily, decided to send Lewis and Clark in 1804 across the unexplored reaches of the continent to determine if rivers might offer an alternate water route west. That, too, proved to be impossible, although their expedition was a success for other reasons.
- The Northwest Passage through the Arctic was actually made in 1903 and 1906 by the famous Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, but the course was never viable as a commercial route due to the hostile nature of the north seas.
- All of that is now changing, and fast, thanks to global warming. The ice seems immune to Republican denials, and continues to melt at unprecedented rates. An ice-free Northwest Passage during the summer might be good for shipping, but bad for the world in general. Snow reflects sunlight, but water absorbs the sun's heat.

- With less ice, more heat is absorbed, leading to more melting, leading to more heat absorption, leading to more melting. That feedback loop accelerates global warming. The likely consequence is a catastrophic rise in sea level, which would dwarf the devastation we saw in New Orleans from Katrina.
- President Bush will not take actions to prevent or mitigate against a problem he denies exists. So while the rest of the world acts, the United States remains on the sidelines. We have abdicated a leadership role on the world stage at a time when our apathy threatens every aspect of our way of life.
- We can only hope that the next president, from any party, will reverse the madness of the Bush Administration, and work concertedly to address the issue of climate change to protect our sovereignty, security, and environment.

**Related Media:**

Arctic Ice Melt Opens Northwest Passage  
Associated Press  
September 15, 2007  
Jamey Keaten

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hU5CoGrg6q9-gg3YfryNK1RfMKPQ>

## Hot Topic: "Evolution vs Intelligent Design"

**Topic Areas:** Public school curricula, religion and politics, science education, evolution

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Intelligent Design is NOT science
- Intelligent Design is religion in thin disguise
- Scientific illiteracy and its impact on society
- Judge's recent ruling against intelligent design: (one of the biggest courtroom clashes between faith and evolution since the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial)
- Why is evolution so misunderstood by the general public?
- The definition of evolution
- Theory versus fact
- Logic versus faith
- Why does evolution strike such a deep chord within us?
- What does it mean to be human?
- How are we different from other animals?
- Evolutionary history tells us about our relationship with the environment today
- Religious influence in American politics
- 15,000 science teachers convened for their annual conference recently, many attended workshops designed to help them deal with the issue of ID vs Evolution

**Related Media:**

Judge rules against "intelligent design: "religious alternative" to evolution barred from public-school classes.  
MSNBC, December 20, 2005  
[CLICK HERE](#) to view the news article (HTML)

## Hot Topic: "Abortion"

**Topic Areas:** Religion, science, government, national politics, ethics, morality, democracy, science policy, prayer in school, faith-based government initiatives

**Suggested Guestpert:** [Jeff Schweitzer, Ph.D.](#)

**What a Guestpert might talk about:**

- Abortion is an invasive surgical technique, physically and psychologically traumatic, expensive, and potentially dangerous. Part of the adult responsibility commensurate with having an active sex life is prudent and careful use of contraception. Unwanted pregnancy should be exceptional rather than routine.
- Education is the most effective tool to reduce the number of abortions. But a woman's right to determine her own reproductive destiny should never be subject to the whims of old white men sitting in state capitals or in the U.S. Congress or on the bench of the Supreme Court.
- Nevertheless, the religious right is now firmly established in power in all branches of government, and in the majority of state capitals. The result has real consequences in daily life, affecting intimate and personal aspects of our lives such as sex and reproductive choice: a woman's right to choose has never been more threatened.
- Fetal rights are latest weapon in the arsenal of the anti-choice movement to limit a woman's rights and to create a separate legal identity for mother and fetus.
- Americans on both sides of debate hold inconsistent views that are swept under the rug. Advocates pro and con speak in euphemisms instead of tackling the issues honestly and head on:
- If abortion is murder, how can we make any exceptions for rape and incest? Yet the vast majority of Americans favor such exceptions. Either abortion is not murder, or we think murder is OK under the right circumstances. Our society's approach to this issue is muddled to say the least.
- The idea that life begins at conception is deeply flawed; true, a fetus has the potential to become human, if it successfully implants in the uterus, is not rejected by the mother's immune system, has no fatal chromosomal abnormalities and the mother herself does not die before giving birth; but an unfertilized egg also has the potential to become human, every bit as much as a fetus, every bit as dependent on a series of contingent events: it just needs to be fertilized first. Each individual sperm has the potential to become human: it just needs to fertilize an egg.

- An egg, sperm and embryo all have the *potential* to become human, and all must be treated equally. Conferring special rights to a fertilized egg is simply arbitrary and the result of religious morality being imposed on society. If you believe that life begins at conception, then a woman is committing murder every time she ovulates and a man is committing millions of murders with each ejaculation.
- Despite sensational appeals to emotion, early-term abortions are removing tissue that has not yet developed into human form. In the absence of a central nervous system, the embryo is incapable of any sensation. Until a brain has developed a functioning cortex, the embryo has no ability to form any conscious thought.
- About eight weeks after fertilization, the first detectable brain waves can be recorded, but the brain is not nearly fully formed, and the cerebral cortex is poorly distinguished. Before eight weeks, in the absence of *any* brain function, the growing embryo is little different in its human potential from a fertilized egg.
- Later stages of growth do not offer a sign as clear as brain development, but the fetus itself provides another point of determination, although one involving a higher emotional and ethical cost in the hierarchy of decision-making: before and after the fetus is capable of living outside the womb, without invasive medical intervention, still fully dependent on the mother's body to support life. Before that point of development, the line from potential to actual human has not been crossed. After that point, abortion becomes problematic and should be severely restricted.

**Related Media:**

**Abortion Vote in House May Be Too Late to Boost GOP**

Noam N. Levey

Los Angeles Times, September 27, 2006

[CLICK HERE](#)