

# WHAT'S NEW Robert L. Park Friday, 15 Apr 05 Washington, DC

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- *From:* Sam Wormley <[swormley1@xxxxxxxxx](mailto:swormley1@xxxxxxxxx)>
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1. KANSAS: AAAS TURNS DOWN AN INVITATION TO DEBATE EVOLUTION.  
Last Friday, the Kansas State Department of Education invited the American Association for the Advancement of Science "to provide expert opinion regarding the mainstream scientific view of the nature of science," at a hearing on evolution. Drawing from the Santorum report language accompanying the No Child left Behind Act, the invitation says the curriculum "should help students understand the full range of scientific views that exist." Of course. The problem is that there is only one scientific view of the origin of species: Darwin's "natural selection." The hearing will be nothing but elaborately staged theater, with intelligent designers portrayed as scientists. The AAAS CEO, Alan Leshner, quite properly declined, "We see no purpose in debating a matter of faith." Neither does WN. But wait, isn't this the same Alan Leshner who defends the AAAS Dialog on Science, Ethics and Religion? In an editorial in the 11 Feb 05 issue of Science, Leshner argued that getting together with religious leaders to discuss the relation of scientific advances to other belief systems is helpful <http://www.aps.org/WN/WN05/wn021105.cfm>.

2. EPHEDRA: FEDERAL JUDGE IN UTAH LIFTS THE FDA BAN ON EPHEDRA.  
In 1998 WN exposed "Vitamin O" as ordinary salt water. The FDA was barred from taking action because salt water is a "natural" supplement. Later that year a UCSF study reported serious side effects from ephedra <http://www.aps.org/WN/WN98/wn112798.cfm>. Sold on the web as "herbal ecstasy," the FDA said ephedra, was also protected by the Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act (DSHEA). It's estimated that there are more adverse reactions to ephedra than all other herbal supplements combined, but not until a young major league pitcher became a victim did the FDA ban it <http://www.aps.org/WN/WN04/wn010204.cfm>. Ephedra was the only supplement banned since passage of DSHEA. Now there are none. The judge lifted the ban because the FDA had not determined a safe level. The FDA had not determined a safe level because it would be unethical to test a substance on people if it's known to be harmful. Once again there are calls to change DSHEA.

3. HOMEOPATHY AT 250: THE POWER OF MEDICINE THAT DOES NO HARM.  
My mail box has been crammed full of homeopathy stuff all week.  
Sunday was the 250th birthday of Samuel Hahnemann, the German  
physician who founded homeopathy in an age of purging and blood-  
letting. Hahnemann's "law of similars" would be a disaster, had  
he not come up with his "law of infinitesimals." His diaper rash  
cure, for example, is rhus toxicodendron (poison ivy). Lucky for  
baby, the law of infinitesimals says to dilute it 200C, i.e.  
there isn't any. We excuse Hahnemann, who didn't have Avogadro's  
number (neither did Avogadro, it was determined 50 years later),  
but homeopaths know it, which goes beyond stupid. And homeopathy  
has its own DSHEA. In 1938 Senator Royal Copeland, a homeopath,  
exempted homeopathy from the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act. After  
all, it would be like trying to show holy water had been blessed.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.

Opinions are the author's and not necessarily shared by the  
University of Maryland, but they should be.

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