

Engaging the Public

Issues at the intersection of science and personal values — from the teaching of evolution, to stem cell research, to global climate change — increasingly strain the science-society relationship. Through its Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology as well as public understanding activities, AAAS provides essential information to conduit audiences, including K–12 teachers, and works to promote respectful dialogue among all stakeholders. Outreach in 2006 included events and resources for families, teachers, reporters, and the public. See www.aaas.org/programs/centers/pe.

Evolution on the Front Line

Teachers from Pennsylvania and Georgia who are resisting efforts to insert religion into science classrooms received a standing ovation in a packed IMAX theater at the start of “Evolution on the Front Line,” a town hall-style event in St. Louis, Mo. Some 500 teachers, scientists, students, and others took part in the public-engagement event, backed by three dozen of the nation’s biggest science and education organizations, during the 2006 AAAS Annual Meeting. Participants heard elegant discourse on the origins of life and received practical advice on how to respond when stu-

dents, parents, or local school officials pressure them to avoid teaching evolution or to introduce creationism or intelligent design doctrines into classes.

The event, plus a related AAAS Board statement opposing efforts to undermine the teaching of evolution, generated news coverage by the Associated Press, Reuters, the BBC, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and many other media outlets, thus raising awareness of the issue. Go to www.aaas.org/evolution.

Science for Families

Families with children, teachers, early-career scientists, and others with a curious mind were once again invited to take part in free Family Science Days during the 2006 AAAS Annual Meeting. Children were encouraged to explore ocean and prairie environments, crawl through a limestone cave, and study the parts of trees and animals — without ever leaving a MySci mobile science van. The rolling classroom from Monsanto offered would-be scientists a chance to get their head, hands, feet, legs, and arms into science. Another Family Science Days collaborator, the St. Louis Science Center, provided Segway Human Transporter demonstrations. And, in keeping with the mandate of the AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology, the Saint Louis Zoo’s Wildcare Institute invited children to touch pelts, skulls, and other items from cheetahs, penguins, and lemurs. Annual Meeting information is online at www.aaasmeeting.org.

EurekaAlert! Online Climate Chat

“There’s little doubt that humans are largely responsible for the warming that has occurred over the last few decades,” said Michael Oppenheimer of Princeton University, during an online chat organized by



“The event started with a movie, projected onto the giant IMAX screen, that celebrated science teachers who have been fighting for evolution education in the face of pressure from their school boards and administrators. After that, teachers from Dover High School and from Cobb County, in Georgia — the site of another legal battle over evolution — were introduced and given a standing ovation by the audience.”

The Chronicle of Higher Education, 10 March 2006, describing the AAAS town hall-style event, *Evolution on the Front Line*.

EurekaAlert!, the Association’s premier science-news service for reporters. “And even more important, there’s a certainty that if the greenhouse gases build up at current rates, the Earth will warm over the century to levels that haven’t been seen in a million years.” Oppenheimer took part in the chat, sponsored by the *New York Times* Company Foundation, along with Daniel Schrag of Harvard and moderator Jesse Smith of *Science*. The 5 October event followed an earlier, 2005 online discussion focusing on evolution. Climate experts fielded questions from reporters with such diverse media outlets as *Die Zeit* of Germany, The Independent of London, BBC, and The Australian. “We are sending the Earth back to a state it hasn’t been in for more than 30 million years, and no human being can know exactly what is going to happen,” Schrag warned. “There will be surprises.” See www.eurekaalert.org/expertchat/.



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The Power of Two

During an evening, salon-style event at AAAS with Hana and Francisco J. Ayala, the conversation addressed the origins of the simplest life on Earth, the preservation and study of nature, and rare insights to married life for a multi-disciplinary scientific power couple. The 90-minute public-engagement event, held in the jammed AAAS Auditorium, was moderated by the AAAS CEO, and offered a tour of exotic places like Fiji and Panama, where Hana Ayala is working to develop a visionary economic development model.

The Ayalas’ discussion marked the second AAAS public-engagement “salon.” The first such event featured popular novelist Herman Wouk and his brother, the late Victor Wouk, a visionary scientist and engineer.

Celebrating “Global Horizons”

Leading science thinkers gathered in Los Angeles for a symposium, organized by the University of Southern California and the journal *Science*, focused on research, financial, and cultural issues related to stem cell research, rising global competition, and other critical issues at the forefront of innovation. Conceived during the 125th anniversaries of USC and of *Science*, “Global Horizons: America’s Challenge in Science and Innovation” was triggered by growing concerns regard-

ing science literacy, slipping federal investment in research and development, and other factors that may jeopardize U.S. innovation.

Outlining AAAS Strategies

“The abutment of science with moral or religious values is straining the relationship between science and society,” AAAS CEO Alan I. Leshner, executive publisher of *Science*, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (13 October 2006, *Chronicle Review*, Vol. 53, Issue 8, Page B20). Outlining seven “important — and often humbling lessons” about public engagement, Leshner called for an expansion of traditional public understanding activities, to include bi-directional dialogue on issues such as evolution and stem cell research. “It is not yet clear whether the public-engagement approach will significantly reduce the tension that is weakening science’s relationship with society,” Leshner conceded. “But at a minimum, it should bring scientists into closer proximity with their fellow citizens, which in turn should give each group a far better understanding and greater empathy for the perspective of the other.”