

School board regains evolutionist majority

Supporters of the teaching of evolution in US schools regained leverage in a key battleground state last week when Kansas voters kicked out two conservative members of the state board of education.

The primary election on 1 August means that the new board, once installed in January 2007, will have six members in favour of teaching evolution and four against. The board is expected to overturn teaching standards passed last November that labelled evolution "controversial"; these standards were backed by proponents of intelligent design — the notion that life was shaped by an intelligent designer.

The election is the latest swing in a seven-year tug-of-war. In 1999, the Kansas school board voted to essentially remove evolution from the curriculum, only to overturn that decision the next year when voters installed three moderates on the board. Conservatives regained the majority in 2004.

Supporters of evolution are claiming victory, even if it may only be a temporary one. "The intelligent-design movement is finding out that they can't legislate science," says Jack Krebs, president of Kansas Citizens for Science.

More drilling could benefit Louisiana's wetlands

Oil, gas and healthy wetlands — maybe Louisiana can have it all.

On 1 August, the US Senate voted to open 8.3 million acres to oil and gas drilling — on top of the 40 million already open — on the Gulf of Mexico's outer continental shelf. Half of the extra revenue would be shared among Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. A similar bill from the House of Representatives, passed in June, would open even more areas. The two bills must be reconciled if drilling is to begin.

Louisiana's governor Kathleen Blanco is encouraging her state's residents to vote for a measure that would allocate all the extra



Restoring wetlands could reduce the effect of hurricanes on cities such as New Orleans.

Museum goes ahead with online database

Archaeologists and anthropologists now have online access to a treasure trove of nearly 300,000 artefacts from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania.

The new Quai Branly Museum in Paris, which opened in June, brings together collections of cultural items, textiles and art from France's former colonies. The museum's online database includes details of artefacts, such as the African mask pictured here.

Photographs, historical details and associated research for each artefact are available at the museum's website, www.quaibrany.fr.



P. GRIES/LE DESCONGES/MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY

revenue to coastal restoration and protection against hurricanes. Scientists agree that wetlands reduce the effect of hurricanes on land, and the plan has the support of such diverse groups as the American Petroleum Institute, the hunting organization Ducks Unlimited, and the conservation group Environmental Defense.

Japan lays out plans for a base on the Moon

Japan has announced a timetable for its plans to travel to the Moon. At a symposium on lunar exploration in Tokyo last week, an official at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) announced a deadline of 2020 for sending astronauts to the Moon, and 2030 for constructing a base there.

But the latest plans could cost ¥3 trillion (US\$26 billion), and sceptics are already speaking up. "To go the Moon would cost so much that I don't think anyone could afford to, except possibly America," says Bruno Gardini of the European Space Agency in Noordwijk, the Netherlands.

A more modest proposal comes from South Africa, where the cabinet in July approved plans to bring the country's space activities under the umbrella of a new space agency. Funding has yet to be agreed, but government officials say they hope the agency will be established within a year.

Senators set sights on stem-cell legislation

Congressional backers of human embryonic stem-cell research have a target date for reintroducing legislation to expand support for such research. In January 2007, a bipartisan group of senators plans to bring up the bill as one of its first orders of business with the newly elected

Congress, according to Senator Tom Harkin (Democrat, Iowa).

President George W. Bush vetoed the bill last month (see *Nature* 442, 335; 2006), but a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress could override his decision. "The president's veto is not the last word," said Harkin, who pushed for the legislation. He claims that embryonic stem-cell research will be a key issue in November's elections.

Also last week, the liberal think-tank Center for American Progress released a report arguing that state support for embryonic stem-cell research is insufficient, and that federal funding is needed.

Politicians think locally and act globally on climate

The United States is willing to tackle climate change, at least at a local level. Two high-profile partnerships formed last week aim to tackle greenhouse gases regionally — but with international help.

Former president Bill Clinton has joined forces with mayors from 22 cities on six continents, including London, Los Angeles and Mexico City. The Clinton Climate Initiative will encourage its partners to share resources to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

And British prime minister Tony Blair last week signed up with California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose state is a leader in innovative technologies to cut pollution. The deal is only a statement of intent, but it could bring California into the active UK carbon-trading market.

Correction

The News Feature "A little goes a long way" (*Nature* 442, 351-352; 2006) incorrectly suggested that Steven Ley carries out chemical reactions at -195°C , the temperature of liquid nitrogen. Experiments are in fact performed at -78°C , the temperature of solid carbon dioxide in acetone.