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# Textbooks likely to get OK this week

## State board near end of vetting work

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A four-month debate over Texas textbooks' portrayal of everything from religion to the Alamo and its profound consequences for schoolchildren across the nation is expected to end this week.

Social studies books to be adopted by the State Board of Education were vetted over four months for mistakes, philosophical preferences and compliance with Texas' curriculum.

"I think it's over and done with, and we'll pass the proclamation," said state board Chairwoman Grace Shore, R-Longview.

But at least one board member and one interest group have cautioned that anything can happen at the last minute.

The outcome will affect what students learn nationwide.

Texas is the second-largest textbook market in the country. Public schools will spend \$345 million on the social studies texts alone, and changes made to the Texas books often end up in classrooms elsewhere.

The books, in the end, will incorporate suggestions from the right and the left.

Both sides unleashed their critiques at three public hearings in July, August and September. And publishers, to a great extent, acquiesced to their demands.

At the behest of Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi, for example, Prentice Hall increased Hispanic representation in some books and created a 32-page section featuring many Hispanics,



Samantha Smoot holds a textbook after Tuesday's news conference. Behind her is Peggy Venable, director of the conservative group Citizens for a Sound Economy.

including defenders of the Alamo, who played a role in Texas history.

Publishers also made changes requested by a conservative coalition. The San Antonio-based Texas Public Policy Foundation took the lead with a \$100,000 study that produced a list of 533 alleged mistakes. Other groups, such as the Texas Eagle Forum and Citizens for a Sound Economy, offered their own lists.

According to the Texas Freedom Network, those revisions promote Christianity, attack Islam and distort the teaching of science and slavery.

The network is a liberal group that monitors the religious right.

"These kinds of changes go far beyond anyone's idea of factual errors and constitute a form of censorship," said its director, Samantha Smoot.

Board member David Bradley, R-Beaumont, part of the social conservative bloc on the board, defended the changes.

"Promoting Christianity? That's a crime?" he asked. "America was founded on Christian principles."

Asked if the public could expect swift approval of the texts,

Bradley hesitated.

"Never say never... Twenty-four hours is a long time in education," he said, adding fuel to Smoot's fear of a last-minute pitch from the right for additional changes.

Board members said the debate had been healthy, producing better books and giving the public an opportunity to participate in the selection process.

"It represents democracy in action at its best," said board member Joe Bernal, D-San Antonio.

Bernal praised publishers for increasing minority presence in some of the books, and he called the initial lack of Hispanic representation an "error of omission."

Errors are important to the board, whose role in the textbook debate is only to correct factual errors, determine if the books conform to the state curriculum, and pass judgment on the bindings.

In 1995, lawmakers restricted the board's powers, leaving it "with just enough authority to constantly get us in trouble," said board member Chase Untermeyer, R-Houston.

"Right now we live in this half light," Untermeyer said, "in which textbooks are the best but by no means the only example of the problems faced by having partial powers."

He suggested lawmakers either restore full authority to the board or take it away altogether.

Smoot agreed that something must be done, suggesting that textbook selection be given to a separate entity.

"A narrow group of people is able to use this process to grandstand about their political opinions and affect which books are chosen and which are not," she said. "It's clear that a great many things about this process don't serve children."