

Bush endorses teaching of 'intelligent design' President supports exposure to different ideas: President supports exposure to different ideas

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President Bush has endorsed the teaching of “intelligent design” along with natural selection in a roundtable interview with reporters from Texas newspapers. Bush said public school students should be exposed to the former theory, which posits that biological evidence suggests life is too complex to have evolved without an intelligent designer, presumably a divine Creator.

“I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought,” Bush said in the August 1 interview, according to the Knight-Ridder news service. “[If] you’re asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, the answer is yes,” he continued.

Intelligent design is different from creationism, which seeks to disprove the entire theory of evolution in favor of a religious account of the origins of life. The theory has gained prominence in recent years as conservative Christians have encouraged its teaching in public schools.

The question about intelligent design arose on the same day that the Texas Freedom Network, a religious watchdog group on First Amendment issues, held a news conference to complain about a Bible study course promoted nationwide to school districts by a conservative organization, the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, based in Greensboro, North Carolina. (See related story on page 18.)

In a review of the curriculum by Mark Chancey of Southern Methodist University for the Texas Freedom Network, the biblical studies professor said that, among other things, the discussions of science in the course draw upon the biblical account of creation. According to the network, 52 Texas school districts offer the class. A *New York Times* article published August 1 examined the controversy.

According to Knight-Ridder, Bush declined to offer his personal views on creationism versus evolution. When he was governor of Texas, he endorsed teaching creationism alongside evolution, but the courts have ruled such teaching an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

Biologists, anthropologists and other scientists have attacked intelligent design as gussied-up creationism and an attempt to inject faith-based theories into a science curriculum. However, the philosophy enjoys the support of many more mainstream scientists than does creationism.

“President Bush is to be commended for defending free speech on evolution, and supporting the right of students to hear about different scientific views about evolution,” said John West of the Seattle-based Discovery Institute in a statement on Bush’s comments. West’s organization describes itself as “the nation’s leading think tank supporting research on the theory of intelligent design.”

But a 1999 assessment by the National Academy of Sciences said intelligent design is not germane to a science class setting.

“The claim that equity demands balanced treatment of evolutionary theory and special creation in science classrooms reflects a misunderstanding of what science is and how it is conducted,” the study said. “Creationism, intelligent design, and other claims of supernatural intervention in the origin of life or of species are not science because they are not testable by the methods of science.” *-Associated Baptist Press*