Judge rules intelligent design is not science: The Dover, Pennsylvania, case

News in the issue

In a closely watched case over whether intelligent design theory may be taught in science classrooms, a federal judge has ruled that ID instruction, because of its creationist roots, would violate the First Amendment ban on promoting religious beliefs.

U.S. District Judge John Jones ruled December 20 that the Dover, Pennsylvania, school district cannot teach ID as an alternate explanation for theories of evolution in science classes. ID proponents contend that an unspecified supernatural being accounts for the complexity of nature.

Jones said in his 139-page opinion that he "addressed the seminal question of whether ID is science." Jones said he concluded that "it is not, and moreover that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents."

The ruling was viewed as a setback for many Christian conservatives. "This decision is a slam dunk for supporters of evolution and a real defeat for Darwin's opponents," said David Masci of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The ID concept was termed disguised creationism by experts who testified on behalf of parents who had sued to thwart school board plans to introduce ID in science classes.

The judge agreed, saying that ID proponents "make a bedrock assumption which is utterly false. Their presumption is that evolutionary theory is antithetical to a belief in the existence of a supreme being and to religion in general." Jones noted that scientific experts who testified said that evolution "in no way conflicts with, nor does it deny, the existence of a divine creator."

"To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect," Jones said. "However, the fact a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions."