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### Bush Remarks On 'Intelligent Design' Theory Fuel Debate

By Peter Baker and Peter Slevin  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
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President Bush invigorated proponents of teaching alternatives to evolution in public schools with remarks saying that schoolchildren should be taught about "intelligent design," a view of creation that challenges established scientific thinking and promotes the idea that an unseen force is behind the development of humanity.

Although he said that curriculum decisions should be made by school districts rather than the federal government, Bush told Texas newspaper reporters in a group interview at the White House on Monday that he believes that intelligent design should be taught alongside evolution as competing theories.

"Both sides ought to be properly taught . . . so people can understand what the debate is about," he said, according to an official transcript of the session. Bush added: "Part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought. . . . You're asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, and the answer is yes."

These comments drew sharp criticism yesterday from opponents of the theory, who said there is no scientific evidence to support it and no educational basis for teaching it.

Much of the scientific establishment says that intelligent design is not a tested scientific theory but a cleverly marketed effort to introduce religious -- especially Christian -- thinking to students. Opponents say that church groups and other interest groups are pursuing political channels instead of first building support through traditional scientific review.

The White House said yesterday that Bush's comments were in keeping with positions dating to his Texas governorship, but aides say they could not recall him addressing the issue before as president. His remarks heartened conservatives who have been asking school boards and legislatures to teach students that there are gaps in evolutionary theory and explain that life's complexity is evidence of a guiding hand.

"With the president endorsing it, at the very least it makes Americans who have that position more respectable, for lack of a better phrase," said Gary L. Bauer, a Christian conservative leader who ran for president against Bush in the 2000 Republican primaries. "It's not some backwater view. It's a view held by the majority of Americans."

John G. West, an executive with the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank supporting intelligent design, issued a written statement welcoming Bush's remarks. "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," he said.

Opponents of intelligent design, which a Kansas professor once called "creationism in

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President Bush said students "ought to be exposed to different ideas." (Gerald Herbert - AP)

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a cheap tuxedo," say there is no legitimate debate. They see the case increasingly as a political battle that threatens to weaken science teaching in a nation whose students already are lagging.

"It is, of course, further indication that a fundamentalist right has really taken over much of the Republican Party," said Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), a leading liberal lawmaker. Noting Bush's Ivy League education, Frank said, "People might cite George Bush as proof that you can be totally impervious to the effects of Harvard and Yale education."

Bush's comments were "irresponsible," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He said the president, by suggesting that students hear two viewpoints, "doesn't understand that one is a religious viewpoint and one is a scientific viewpoint." Lynn said Bush showed a "low level of understanding of science," adding that he worries that Bush's comments could be followed by a directive to the Justice Department to support legal efforts to change curricula.

Bush gave no sign that he intended to wade that far into the debate. The issue came up only when a reporter from the Knight Ridder news service asked him about it; participants said the president did not seem especially eager to be asked. "Very interesting question," he told the reporter playfully.

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