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During a [press conference](#) [4] with a group of Texas reporters on August 1, 2005, President George W. Bush responded to a question about teaching "intelligent design" in the public schools. The reporter referred to "what seems to be a growing debate over evolution versus intelligent design" and asked, "What are your personal views on that, and do you think both should be taught in public schools?" In response, Bush referred to his days as governor of Texas, when "I said that, first of all, that decision should be made to local school districts, but I felt like both sides ought to be properly taught ... so people can understand what the debate is about." (It is noteworthy that Bush tacitly equated "intelligent design" and creationism.) Pressing the issue, the reporter asked, "So the answer accepts the validity of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution?" Bush avoided a direct answer, construing the question instead as a fairness issue: "you're asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, and the answer is yes."

Although there was nothing unexpected about Bush's response, which is consistent with his previous statements on the topic, the present heightened awareness of issues involving evolution education ensured a media frenzy. NCSE was widely consulted for comment. *The New York Times* [quoted](#) [5] NCSE's Susan Spath on the specious appeal to fairness: "It sounds like you're being fair, but creationism is a sectarian religious viewpoint, and intelligent design is a sectarian religious viewpoint," she said. "It's not fair to privilege one religious viewpoint by calling it the other side of evolution." NCSE's Glenn Branch concurred, [telling](#) [6] the *Los Angeles Times* that because "[t]he question was presented to him as a fairness issue," it was not surprising that Bush expressed the view that "both sides ought to be taught." Branch also [told](#) [7] the *Financial Times* that "Bush would have done better to heed his White House science adviser, John Marburger, who [has] said that evolution was the 'cornerstone of modern biology' and who has characteri[z]ed ID as not even being a scientific theory."

When interviewed by *The New York Times*, Marburger reiterated that "evolution is the cornerstone of modern biology" and that "intelligent design is not a scientific concept." According to the *Times*, Marburger -- who is Science Adviser to the President and Director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy -- suggested that it would be "over-interpreting" Bush's remarks to endorse equal treatment for "intelligent design" and evolution in the public schools. Instead, he said, Bush's remarks should be interpreted as recommending the discussion of "intelligent design" as part of the "social context" in science classes. Marburger's charitable interpretation was not shared, however, by Richard Land, the president of the ethics and religious liberties commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, whom the *Times* quoted as construing Bush's remarks as supportive of the view he favors: "if you're going to teach the Darwinian theory as evolution, teach it as theory. And then teach another theory that has the most support among scientists" -- presumably alluding to "intelligent design."

The scientific community is already rushing to deplore Bush's remarks. The American Geophysical Union issued a press release in which its executive director Fred Spilhaus [stated](#) [8], "President Bush, in advocating that the concept of 'intelligent design' be taught alongside the theory of evolution, puts America's schoolchildren at risk." The American Physical Society accepted Marburger's interpretation of Bush's remarks, but [emphasized](#) [9] that "only scientifically validated theories, such as evolution, should be taught in the nation's science classes." The American Institute of Biological Sciences issued a press release in which its president Marvalee Wake [stated](#) [10], "Intelligent design is not a scientific theory and must not be taught in science classes." And in a letter to President Bush, Robert Kirschner, the president of the American Astronomical Society, [commented](#) [11] that "intelligent design has neither scientific evidence to support it nor an educational basis for teaching it as science."

The education community is expressing its concern, too. The National Science Teachers Association, the world's largest group of science educators, [was](#) [12] "stunned and disappointed that President Bush is endorsing the teaching of intelligent design -- effectively opening the door for nonscientific ideas to be taught in the nation's K-12 science classrooms." The American Federation of Teachers, with over 1.3 million members, [described](#) [13] Bush's remarks as "a huge step backward for science education in the United States," adding that "[b]y backing concepts that lack scientific merit, President Bush is undermining his own pledge to 'leave no child behind.'"

On editorial and op-ed pages, Bush's remarks are taking a hammering. The *Washington Post's* editorialist [wrote](#) [14], "To pretend that the existence of evolution is somehow still an open question, or that it is one of several equally valid theories, is to misunderstand the intellectual and scientific history of the past century." Referring to "intelligent design," the *Baltimore Sun's* editorialist [wrote](#) [15] **[Link broken]**, "It's creationism by another name, and if it makes its way into schools at all, it should definitely not be part of science classes." In its editorial, the *Sacramento Bee* connected the dots between Bush's remarks and the Wedge strategy for promoting "intelligent design," [commenting](#) [16] **[Link broken]**, "America's children deserve a first-rate education in science in public school and not a false, politically motivated 'Teach the Controversy' debate between science and religion." And in his column in *The New York Times*, the economist Paul Krugman perceptively [remarked](#) [17], "intelligent design doesn't have to attract significant support from actual researchers to be effective. All it has to do is create confusion, to make it seem as if there really is a controversy about the validity of evolutionary theory."

[Note: This story overlaps with NCSE's [previous story](#) [18] on August 3, 2005, and slightly updates the story in NCSE's weekly e-newsletter ([subscription instructions](#) [19]) for August 5, 2005.]

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