

## NASA SAYS NO TO INTELLIGENT DESIGN



NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory has landed robotic explorers on the surface of Mars, sent probes to outer planets and operates a worldwide network of antennas that communicates with interplanetary spacecraft. Intelligent Design, ID, or the belief that a higher power must have had a hand in creation because life is too complex to have developed through evolution alone has placed NASA in a mission of different sorts in defending itself in a workplace lawsuit against a former computer specialist who claims he was demoted - and then let go - for promoting his views on intelligent design. David Coppedge, who was let go last year after 15 years work as a "team lead" on the Cassini mission exploring Saturn and its many moons, alleges that he was discriminated against because he engaged his co-workers in conversations about intelligent design and handed out DVDs on the idea while at work. Supporters of intelligent design, the Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian civil rights group, and the Discovery Institute are among those supporting Coppedge's case. "It's part of a pattern. There is basically a war on anyone who dissents from Darwin and we've seen that for several years," said John West, associate director of Center for Science and Culture at the Seattle-based Discovery Institute. "This is free speech, freedom of conscience 101". Mr. Coppedge believes his support for a state ballot measure that sought to define marriage as limited to heterosexual couples and his request to rename the annual holiday party a 'Christmas party, were also instrumental to his demotion. Attorney to Mr. Coppedge, William Becker, says his client was singled out by his bosses because they perceived his belief in intelligent design to be religious. Becker, says, "David had this reputation for being a Christian, for being a practicing one. He did not go around evangelising or proselytising. But if he found out that someone was a Christian he would say, "Oh that's interesting, what denomination are you?" "He's not apologizing for who he is. He's an evangelical Christian". Eugene Volokh, a professor of First Amendment law at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law says that while the case has attracted interest because of the controversial nature of intelligent design, it is at its heart a straightforward discrimination case. "The question is whether the plaintiff was fired simply because he was wasting people's time and bothering them in ways that would have led him to being fired regardless of whether it was about religion or whether he was treated worse based on the religiosity of his beliefs," said Volokh. "If he can show that, then he's got a good case."

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