

Cornell chief rejects intelligent design

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Hunter Rawlings III, Cornell University's interim president, says teaching intelligent design as science is a dangerous move.

Rawlings made the statement during his state of the university address last week, the New York Times reported Tuesday.

His staff told the Times Rawlings discussed the topic, in part because he is serving only temporarily as president. He was Cornell's president from 1995 to 2003, and returned after Jeffrey Lehman resigned in June, citing differences with the university's trustees.

Intelligent design is a theory that says the universe is too complex to be the result of evolution and natural selection and, therefore, a higher power is responsible. Rawlings denounced intelligent design as a "religious belief masquerading as a secular idea."

Declaring the question a cultural issue and not a scientific one, Rawlings noted religious groups have disputed the theory of evolution since Charles Darwin published "The Origin of Species" in 1859. He urged Cornell's staff to object to any blurring of the line between religion and science.

John West, a fellow at the Discovery Institute in Seattle -- a leader in the intelligent design movement -- told the Times he's concerned Rawlings is "fanning the flames of intolerance."

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