

Ex NASA expert attacks bosses in religious row

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A former expert at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) claimed Monday he was falsely accused of harassing co-workers about religion, as he took the stand at an unfair dismissal trial.

Computer administrator David Coppedge, who describes himself as an evangelical Christian, was fired last year after expressing support for intelligent design to fellow employees.

His trial started last week, and on Monday testified that his supervisor Gregory Chin had wrongly accused him, threatened his freedom of [religion](#) and created a potentially hostile working environment.

"You are pushing your religion in this office and harassing people with this religion," Chin said, according to Coppedge, who added: "He was angry and he got angrier."

Coppedge said he asked Chin why he considered intelligent design anything but science. "Dave, [intelligent design](#) is religion," Chin replied, according to Coppedge.

Chin warned him against discussing religion or politics with colleagues, he said.

"I felt threatened .. I said: 'Greg, this gets into issues of free speech and freedom of religion ... this could be construed as creating a hostile work environment'," he added.

Coppedge filed a religious discrimination lawsuit in April 2010, and claims he was dismissed nine months later in retaliation for taking the legal action -- but JPL said he was laid off as part of a staff reduction.

Coppedge, who had joined JPL in 1996, was an information technology specialist and system administrator -- and team leader -- on the project's Cassini mission to Saturn.

He lost his team leader role in 2009, and left the company last year after 15 years.

In a sworn declaration last week, he denied he was aggressive in voicing views about religion, including by sending emails criticizing the change in name of the 2003 Cassini Christmas party to a "holiday party."

"I was not pushy, scolding or demanding in these emails," he said. "In fact, my purpose was to convince them to not be so politically correct. It wouldn't have made any sense for me to have been pushy," he said.

In a statement issued as the trial opened, JPL dismissed the charges, saying: "The suit is completely without merit and we intend to vigorously fight the allegations raised by Mr Coppedge."

JPL is a division of the California Institute of Technology, which operates under a contract with [NASA](#).

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