Belief Doesn’t Make It Science Creationism Born Again as Intelligent Design:

Mark Twain once quipped, "I believe that our Heavenly Father invented man because he was disappointed in the monkey."

To me, this is a great joke about evolution. To many conservative Christians, however, it isn’t the slightest bit funny because it suggests a fallible, trial-and-error god inconsistent with the theory of intelligent design. For those of you who care about public education or pay taxes to fund it, be on guard against this intelligent, well-designed euphemism for old-fashioned biblical creationism.

Intelligent design claims that the universe is too complex -- and humans too special -- to have evolved accidentally or erratically. This sounds perfectly reasonable and might even be true. Alas, this belief can't be proved right or wrong because it lies beyond the reach of the scientific method. Hence, it shouldn't be taught in the public schools.

The universe is indeed as complex as it is beautiful. Evolution gave us that complexity, regardless of whether you believe something divine created the universe or gave it rules to work with. When all types of evolution are taken together -- cosmic, stellar, chemical, geological, climatic and organic -- the grand sum can explain most of what we see around us today, ranging from exploding supernovae in distant galaxies to the salinity of the smallest bacteria. These concepts can be taught in public schools because there's no theological content involved. In fact, the best reason to teach evolutionary process is to give children the possibility of being truly amazed by the wondrous work of nature.

But to teach public school students that the universe was designed with the goal of complexity and beauty in mind is wrong because that promulgates theism. To teach the opposite -- that God did not have this in mind -- is also wrong because that promulgates atheism. Both are religious points of view. Both are illegal where church and state are supposed to remain separated. Both are pseudo-science because they require unprovable assumptions.

Many New Englanders believe that Bible-banging creationists are a subspecies whose habitat lies in the broad belt of intellectual latitude between Georgia and Oklahoma. Though the majority of Christian fundamentalists do live south of the Mason-Dixon Line, many live alarmingly close. How else could we explain the election of Daniel L. Hooker to the New York State Assembly, where, on May 3, he introduced Bill 8036? His bill would require that "all pupils in grades kindergarten through 12 in all public schools in the state shall receive instruction in both theories of intelligent design and evolution ... provided by or under the direct supervision of regular classroom teachers." A related bill would give schools and other public buildings the right to exhibit the Ten Commandments.

Assemblyman Hooker is a man with an agenda heading toward political theocracy. He is right about wanting the rules for human society to be clearly evident; most social species have evolved traits for guiding social behavior. But he is wrong to suggest that one specific set of rules known as the Ten Commandments -- developed millenniums ago by one small fragment of humanity in one tiny corner of the world -- should be applied to a place as pluralistic and cosmopolitan as the modern United States. And he's dead wrong about disregarding the knowledge gained from evolutionary inquiry, some of which is being used to save a human life in a hospital near you.

So, teachers, parents, voters and taxpayers: Beware of intelligent design. Think of it as a new and improved carnivore of ideological progress, one with better cultural camouflage than creationism. Though it sounds secular by not relying on any specific god or religious tradition, it is really monotheistic wishful thinking attached to science curriculums like an ectoparasite. Intelligent design
is probably sneaking into a town near you, stalking our scientific understanding of the tangible world we teach to our kids. Beware the smoke and mirrors of this latest attack on public education.

Amen.