

*From Juan Cole's Web Site:*

### **Florida Funeral Director Buries Universities**

**Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala**, has introduced a Horowitz-inspired so-called Academic Freedom Bill of Rights in the Florida State legislature. In our Orwellian world, this is actually a bill to destroy academic freedom and take away rights of free speech on campus. **Baxley is a funeral director**, and apparently he wants to bury higher education in this country along with his other clients.

"The bill sets a statewide standard that students cannot be punished for professing beliefs with which their professors disagree. Professors would also be advised to teach alternative "serious academic theories" that may disagree with their personal views.

According to a legislative staff analysis of the bill, the law would give students who think their beliefs are not being respected legal standing to sue professors and universities.

Students who believe their professor is singling them out for "public ridicule" – for instance, when professors use the Socratic method to force students to explain their theories in class – would also be given the right to sue.

"Some professors say, 'Evolution is a fact. I don't want to hear about Intelligent Design (a creationist theory), and if you don't like it, there's the door,'" Baxley said, citing one example when he thought a student should sue."

Let me explain some things to Representative Baxley, and to do so I suggest we look at how well he is doing his job.

The per capita income in the United States is \$37,800.

Florida's per capita income in 2003 was \$27,610.

**And what of Ocala**, for which Mr. Baxley supposedly is working? "The per capita income for the city is \$18,021. 18.1% of the population and 13.2% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total population, 28.6% of those under the age of 18 and 9.8% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line."

Hmmm. Ocala isn't doing very well. Its people are making about half what Americans generally do, and quite a few of them are dirt poor. I wonder if Baxley has done anything lately for the 18 percent of his constituents who are doomed *to live below the poverty line*? Or, indeed, has he provided jobs and income to his hardworking constituents. If I were them, I'd find a state representative who would work hard to lift people out of their difficult circumstances, instead of one who seems to want to keep people mired in ignorance and poverty.

So if Baxley, who desperately needed to take Biology 101 at Florida State (which should consider revoking his BA), succeeded in his little ploy, what will likely ensue?

If I were Baxley I wouldn't stand anywhere near I-95 north of Gainesville, since he's likely to get run over by the rush of professors fleeing the state at 95 miles an hour. Post-secondary teachers already suffer from low salaries and poor working conditions compared to their peers who go into the professions. The only trade-off they get is that academics have more control over their lives and the time to research and teach things they are interested in. Given a choice between being made Baxley's slaves and braving hurricanes in Florida or living in a state that respects its thinkers, Florida's educators will pour out of the state faster than a 'gator chasing a fat, balding funeral director through the swamps.

Baxley may be happier without any of those intell-Ec-tu-al riffraff cluttering up his state. But maybe his constituents won't be. Knowledge workers, you see, are the geese that lay the golden eggs. Post-secondary teachers are the ones who train the people who found computer software, biotechnology and other companies key to the twenty-first century economy. They also train society's managers and middle managers. The more high-powered academics you have in your state, the wealthier your state will be.

Ocala, and Florida more generally, look to me like they would benefit from some biotech companies. But you know what? That requires being good in a little thing called *biology*. Baxley clearly can't think straight on that subject, being blinded by fanaticism. And he wants to make Florida inhospitable to high-powered biologists. The people of Florida, and more specifically Ocala, should give some thought to whether they really want this loud-mouthed ignoramus to plunge them into poverty and make them mule drivers and ditch diggers by his destruction of education in the state.

In fact, **Ocala has a Central Florida Community College** where that dangerous subject of *science* is actually taught. Want to make a bet that Baxley has never done anything in the legislature to try to expand it into a four-year college so that some of his constituents could get their education without having to leave town or going to a private university? Wouldn't such an expansion create a multiplier effect, helping with Marion County's poverty? Instead of expanding education for the people he says he is serving, Baxley is trying to destroy the state's universities.

All this is without regard to the practical effects of this horse manure on our intellectual environment on campuses. If Baxley's bill passes, professors who teach the history of the Holocaust will just have to give A's to students who deny it ever happened, I guess.

Finally, the post-secondary educators in Florida might just form a Political Action Committee **similar to the one in Alabama**. They might reach out to the faculty in the medical schools, who are mysteriously attached to the academic study of *biology*, and who are not without resources. Perhaps they will decide to channel large sums to Baxley's opponents in the next election, whether a Republican challenger or a rival from another party. You wonder if educators should let a thing like this be forgotten, or just lie down and let themselves be walked all over by paleontologically-challenged funeral directors.