

POLITICS AND POLICY

Congress Wades Into Campus Politics

**Republicans Push for Academic Bill of Rights
To Ensure 'Dissenting Viewpoints' in Class**

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WASHINGTON -- College campuses can be political hotbeds. And that has some members of Congress thinking they should get involved.

Some Republicans are pushing a measure through the House of Representatives meant to ensure that students hear "dissenting viewpoints" in class and are protected from retaliation because of their politics or religion. Colleges say the measure isn't needed, but with Congress providing billions of dollars to higher education, they are worried.

The measure's chief promoter, Marxist-turned-conservative activist David Horowitz, says an academic bill of rights will protect students from possible political "hectoring" and discrimination by their professors. "We have enough institutions in America that are political. Let's keep [universities] above that fray," he adds.

But professors say Mr. Horowitz really is trying to silence liberal faculty members. "It's an invitation for the government to get involved in the internal affairs of the university," says William Scheuerman, a political scientist at the State University of New York at Oswego, and president of the state's faculty union. "We don't want Big Brother here."

As it is, the measure is a sense-of-Congress resolution that comes with no enforcement powers or funding. Although it has passed a key committee vote, it still faces a long and potentially rancorous party-line fight in the House. There is no companion bill in the Senate.

But Mr. Horowitz's measure concerns colleges and universities because it reflects lawmakers' growing exasperation with higher education. The federal government provides loans to more than half of all college students and grant aid to about one in three, leaving many colleges vulnerable to congressional displeasure.

The House resolution suggests how seriously conservatives take the issue of academic rights, and implies they might be willing to use the big stick of federal funding down the road.

Higher-education lobbyists say Congress hasn't used that leverage to force curriculum changes on colleges or to retaliate for the political leanings of their students or faculty.

"Not in this round," says Mr. Horowitz to questions about whether the House bill can be enforced. But if the universities are "completely

irresponsible, then we're going to nudge them," he adds.

Congressional pique with universities has been growing for years. Conservative lawmakers, including House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, complain that they are relentlessly badgered for more money for student grants and loans, but are stiff-armed when they ask for accountability measures in return. Two years ago, with college tuition soaring, higher-education lobbying groups beat back a House Republican attempt to link some federal aid to the colleges' willingness to limit price increases. Colleges also have battled House attempts to hold them accountable for the graduation rates and learning progress of their students.

The academic-rights bill poses a different risk for colleges and universities, though, because it second-guesses their classroom practices, says Robert Andringa, president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, which represents 131 schools. "If Congress feels it needs to start addressing academic freedom in a law, what's next?" he asks.

The current legislation is being fueled by several headline-grabbing incidents last school year involving outspoken college professors, including a University of Colorado teacher who justified the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. The larger backdrop, though, is the culture war simmering on campuses that long have tended to be politically and socially liberal, but now are experiencing the growth of conservative political and evangelical Christian groups.

Those groups complain about a lack of intellectual diversity on their campuses, even as universities undertake high-profile and expensive racial- and ethnic-diversity programs. To prove the point, conservative groups this year tabulated the political-party registrations of their professors, then published statistics that they said show Democrats predominate on most campuses.

Mr. Horowitz says he began promoting his seven-page academic bill of rights as a way to "protect the independence of the universities" from lawmakers or others that might try to interfere should professors be seen as overtly political. Among other things, his measure calls for hiring and promotion decisions to be based solely on a professor's competence, for reading lists to include dissenting viewpoints and for schools to "welcome a diversity of approaches to unsettled questions." Faculty members shouldn't use their courses for "indoctrination," it adds.

Through an organization called Students for Academic Freedom, Mr. Horowitz also has called on students to report professors who they think promote a political viewpoint or discriminate against students for their beliefs. The two-year-old group, which says it has 150 campus chapters, has introduced nonbinding academic-rights measures in a dozen state legislatures, including those in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida.

In its most significant victory, Colorado's public universities pledged to follow Mr. Horowitz's bill of rights in return for the withdrawal of a binding law then before the legislature.

Roger Bowen, general secretary of the American Association of University

Professors, the faculty union, dismisses Mr. Horowitz's assertion that he is only acting to protect colleges. He sees a bill of rights as an attempt by conservative politicians to "rectify what they believe is an ideological imbalance" on the campuses. Because it "comes at a time when power in Washington is heavily tilted in one direction, that concerns me," he adds.

Members of Congress began pondering their own academic bill of rights two years ago when Rep. Jack Kingston, a Georgia Republican, introduced a bill that largely copied Mr. Horowitz's wording. Mr. Kingston, whose father and sister are professors, says he is "pro-academic." But with taxpayers providing billions of dollars to the universities, they should be assured that professors won't "ridicule my kid when he has a George Bush bumper sticker," he says.

The Kingston measure went nowhere for two years, but in June, Republicans attached a shortened version to the Higher Education Act, which provides grants and loans to millions of college students. In hopes of heading it off, university presidents passed their own academic-rights statement. But the House education committee passed the measure anyway, over the opposition of Democrats who called Mr. Horowitz's student groups "thought police."

Faculty groups say that Congress's measure is costly and unnecessary. Florida has estimated that an academic-rights measure before its legislature would cost \$4.3 million a year in staffing and legal costs. The AAUP argues that colleges already have grievance procedures and student-written teacher evaluations where allegations of ideological discrimination can be aired.

For Congress to get involved suggests "a lack of professionalism" among teachers, says David Hollinger, who heads the AAUP's committee on academic freedom and teaches the history of academia at the University of California at Berkeley.

Mr. Horowitz says that isn't the point, and that his measure is only about "decorum," "consumer fraud" and protecting the core values of the universities from activist professors. "It will only be a conservative issue if liberals make it that," he adds.