



South Dakota LEGISLATURE



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Measure promoting intellectual diversity approved by House

By Celeste Calvitto, Journal Staff Writer

PIERRE -- The South Dakota House of Representatives on Wednesday approved a measure that sponsors say is intended to promote a balance of ideas on college campuses.

HB1222, passed by a vote of 42-26, asks the Board of Regents to report annually on what the state's six universities are doing to promote "intellectual diversity," defined as "a learning environment that exposes students to a variety of political, ideological and other perspectives."

"The 2007 higher education budget request is half a billion dollars," Rep. Phyllis Heineman, R-Sioux Falls, the chief sponsor of the bill, said. "It is simply good governance that legislators ask questions and seek answers. Students and taxpayers deserve no less."

Opponents cited concerns raised by Board of Regents executive director Tad Perry at a committee hearing Tuesday on the bill. "I believe HB1222 is a national problem seeking a solution in South Dakota," Rep. Elaine Roberts, D-Sioux Falls, said.

Roberts said the bill cites a report by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, or ACTA, which pointed to "the one-sided nature" of faculty on college campuses. But she said the 50 colleges surveyed do not reflect campuses in South Dakota.

The ratio of political affiliation of professors at Stanford University was Democratic by 8 to 1, Roberts said. "Does that surprise you? It's California," she said. "I suspect that if you look at political affiliation in South Dakota, you might find a very different response. Does that mean there ought to be quotas?"

Roberts said she hasn't heard of anyone being jeered or heckled on state campuses because of their views.

"I don't believe it's a problem in South Dakota," she said.

Rep. Joel Dykstra, R-Canton, said that is not the case.

"This is a national problem, but it is also in existence in South Dakota," he said.

Dykstra said some students have the impression they must agree with the political philosophy of their professors in order to be successful in their classes.

"Here in South Dakota, we may be able to avoid the national trend, but our academic community should not be afraid of intellectual diversity," Dykstra said. "We should recognize it as an introduction of alternative ideas."

Other opponents took issue with a list of suggestions included in the bill on which reports can be based, such as encouraging a variety of speakers at campuses and creating an ombudsman.

Rep. Tom Hills, R-Spearfish, a retired Black Hills State University professor and dean, said the bill would "micromanage" tasks that should be left up to administrators.

But Rep. Thomas Brunner, R-Nisland, disagreed. He said the criteria are merely suggestions and that an annual report is not a hardship.

let's you read the opinions of the state's top lawmakers, and comment on their positions.

"If the Board of Regents spent as much time doing a report as it has fighting this bill, we would be OK," he said.

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