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South Dakota Senate Kills Bill Requiring Annual Reports on Intellectual Diversity at Colleges

By SARA HEBEL

The South Dakota Senate last week rejected legislation that would have required the state's public colleges to report annually on steps they had taken to ensure intellectual diversity and the free exchange of an array of ideas on their campuses.

The senators defeated the measure, HB 1222, by a vote of 18 to 15. Eight Republicans joined all 10 of the state's Democratic senators in opposing the bill, which passed the South Dakota House of Representatives this month, 42 to 26 (The Chronicle, February 9). Both chambers of the Legislature are controlled by Republicans.

Lawmakers who backed the measure had argued that it would make clear that the Legislature values intellectual diversity, which the bill defined as "the foundation of a learning environment that exposes students to a variety of political, ideological, and other perspectives." The measure's supporters, who were mostly Republicans, had said the legislation would allow for better oversight of how well the state's campuses were protecting diverse views.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a national education group that advocates academic freedom and a traditional curriculum, also supported the bill and had offered guidance in crafting the legislation.

Anne D. Neal, president of the trustees' group, said she "regretted" the legislation's defeat. She said the bill would have ensured that South Dakota institutions were taking concrete steps to prevent viewpoint discrimination and to ensure a robust exchange of ideas on their campuses.

Higher-education officials in South Dakota opposed the intellectual-diversity measure. They argued that its adoption would have conveyed the inaccurate message that the state's institutions had problems that required political interference to solve.

Robert T. (Tad) Perry, executive director of the South Dakota Board of Regents, which governs the state's public colleges,

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said his board already has adequate reporting systems and grievance procedures in place to protect diverse views on campuses.

"This was a national solution looking for a local problem to solve," Mr. Perry said. He also criticized the legislation for being cast in a way that he said "carried with it a political agenda and an ideological agenda."

Debate over the South Dakota bill has come as Republican lawmakers in several state legislatures have introduced a measure, the "academic bill of rights," that seeks to ensure that college students' views are protected and promotes intellectual diversity on campuses. Although the legislation is worded so as to protect a range of views, many of its advocates have backed it on the basis of a belief that college students with conservative beliefs are often treated unfairly.

Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [South Dakota House Passes Bill Requiring Colleges to Submit Annual Reports on Intellectual Diversity](#) (2/9/2006)

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