

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS Before the U.S. House of Representatives March 29, 2006
Statement on HR 609, the "Academic Bill of Rights"

Mr. Speaker, anyone needing proof that federal funding leads to federal control should examine HR 609, the "College Access and Opportunity Act." HR 609 imposes several new federal mandates on colleges, and extends numerous existing mandates. HR 609 proves the prophetic soundness of warnings that federal higher education programs would lead to federal control of higher education.

Opponents of increased federalization of higher education should be especially concerned about HR 609's "Academic Bill of Rights." This provision takes a step toward complete federal control of college curricula, grading, and teaching practices. While the provision is worded as a "sense of Congress," the clear intent is to intimidate college administrators into ensuring professors' lectures and lesson plans meet with federal approval.

The "Academic Bill of Rights" is a response to concerns that federally-funded institutions of higher learner are refusing to allow students to express, or even be exposed to, points of view that differ from those held by their professors. Ironically, the proliferation of "political correctness" on college campuses is largely a direct result of increased government funding of colleges and universities. Federal funding has isolated institutions of higher education from market discipline, thus freeing professors to promulgate their particular views regardless of whether it benefits their students (who are, after all, the professors' customers). Now, in a perfect illustration of how politicians use problems created by previous interventions in the market to justify new interventions, Congress proposes to use the problem of "political correctness" to justify more federal control over college classrooms.

Instead of fostering open dialogue and wide-ranging intellectual inquiry, the main effect of the "Academic Bill of Rights" will be to further stifle debate about controversial topics. This is because many administrators will order their professors not to discuss contentious and divisive subjects, in order to avoid a possible confrontation with the federal government. Those who doubt this should remember that many TV and radio stations minimized political programming in the 1960s and 1970s in order to avoid running afoul of the federal "fairness doctrine."

I am convinced some promoters of the "Academic Bill of Rights" would be perfectly happy if, instead of fostering greater debate, this bill silences discussion of certain topics. Scan the websites of some of the organizations promoting the "Academic Bill of Rights" and you will find calls for silencing critics of the Iraq war and other aspects of American foreign policy.

Mr. Speaker, HR 609 expands federal control over higher education; in particular through an "Academic Bill of Rights" which could further stifle debate and inquiry on America's college campus. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to reject this bill.