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# Conservatives Claim Some Victories in Democratic Congress's Higher-Education Bill

By [KELLY FIELD](#)

Washington

Liberal Democrats may have drafted the Higher Education Act reauthorization bill that cleared Congress last week, but conservative Republicans weren't left out of the process entirely.

Buried in the 1,158-page bill awaiting the president's signature are two provisions long sought by conservative groups. One would require federally financed international-studies programs to "reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views." The other would create a new grant program to promote the teaching of traditional American history and Western civilization.

Both additions were requested by Sen. Judd Gregg, Republican of New Hampshire, a member and former chairman of the Senate education committee.

Conservatives have for years been calling for increased federal oversight of foreign-language and area-studies programs that are supported under Title VI of the Higher Education Act.

In 2003, Stanley Kurtz, who was then a research scholar at the Hoover Institution, told a U.S. House of Representatives higher-education subcommittee that such programs "tend to purvey extreme and one-sided criticisms of American foreign policy," and recommended that Congress create a supervisory board to monitor the programs ([The Chronicle](#), June 20, 2003). That proposal drew support from Jewish and Israeli advocacy groups, who have complained that the centers are too pro-Arab, and the panel introduced legislation to create such an advisory board later that year.

But higher-education groups and the centers themselves fought the plan, warning that a politically appointed advisory panel might meddle in colleges' curricula. During debate over the measure in 2003, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, echoed their concerns, saying such a board "could be an intrusion by the federal government into academic freedom."

Since then, the measure has undergone significant changes. The most recent version would do away with the advisory panel and instead require international-studies programs applying for Title VI funds to explain how they "will reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views."

Still, conservatives are claiming victory. Mr. Kurtz, who wrote an article in March for the *National Review* expressing concern about Saudi influence on federally supported public-outreach programs, called the provision an "important step."

"For the first time, Congress has gone on record voicing support for the value of intellectual diversity," he wrote in an e-mail message to *The Chronicle*.

But international-studies programs are nervous that the government might use the new requirement to interfere in colleges' curricular decisions.

"I don't know anyone who is against diverse perspectives; it's like motherhood and apple pie," said Miriam A. Kazanjian of the Coalition for International Education. The question, she said, is how the Department of Education will interpret and administer the new requirement, particularly given that Congress also barred the department from dictating colleges' curricula.

### **Teaching 'Traditional' History**

The new grant program, which would provide aid to institutions to establish or strengthen programs to promote "traditional American history," "the history and nature of, and threats to, free institutions," and "the history and achievements of Western civilization" has had an even longer gestation.

The National Association of Scholars first proposed the program six years ago, in an effort to secure federal support for a growing network of centers focusing on traditional American history; Senator Gregg and Rep. Thomas E. Petri, a Republican from Wisconsin, offered bills to create the program in 2003. But the bills languished until last year, when they were attached to the Senate version of the legislation to renew the Higher Education Act.

In a news release, Stephen H. Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, said passage of the grant program would give the organization's movement to revive the teaching of traditional American history "even greater momentum."

The bill also contains a "sense of Congress" regarding free speech on campus. Inspired by the "academic bill of rights" promoted by the conservative activist David Horowitz, the sense of Congress says that colleges should "facilitate the free and open exchange of ideas" and that "students should not be intimidated, harassed, discouraged from speaking out, or discriminated against," and "should be treated equally and fairly." It also suggests that any sanctions colleges place on students be imposed "objectively and fairly."

In a news release, Senator Gregg took credit for that provision as well.

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