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The Campus Climate Crusade

Liberal groups are out to sully the names of conservative professors and shut down programs funded by the Koch foundation.

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Conservative thought on campus these days is rare, though for some it's still not rare enough. Witness the growing campaign by politicians, unions and environmentalists to intimidate into silence any academic or program that might challenge liberal ideology.

Congressional Democrats have grabbed most of the attention here, with their recent attempt to cow climate skeptics. Richard Lindzen, an emeritus professor of meteorology at MIT and a Cato Institute scholar, earlier this month described in these pages how House Rep. Raul Grijalva was targeting seven academics skeptical of President Obama's climate policies, demanding documents about their funding and connections. A trio of Senate Democrats is working to muzzle more than 100 nonprofits and companies that have questioned the climate agenda, with a fishing expedition into their correspondence.

Largely unnoticed is that the congressional climate crusaders didn't come up with this idea on their own. For several years a coalition of liberal organizations have been using "disclosure" to sully the names of conservative professors and try to shut down their programs. Their particular targets are academics who benefit from funding from the Koch Foundation, which has for decades funded free-market professors and groups on U.S. campuses.

National Association of Scholars President Peter Wood on a new report that shows sustainability initiatives are undermining the traditional liberal arts education. Photo credit: Getty Images.

Giving money to universities, and earmarking it for certain purposes, is common, though the left has largely cornered the market. Billionaire environmentalist Tom Steyer and his wife several years ago pledged \$40 million to Stanford to start the TomKat Center for Sustainable Energy. The Morningside Foundation, established by the family of the late T.H. Chan, last year gave Harvard \$350 million to fund work on, among other things, gun violence and tobacco use. The Helmsley Charitable Trust has given money to several schools to advance Common Core.

Apparently the only kind of thought not allowed is that which might "undermine," according to UnKochMyCampus, "environmental protection, worker's rights, health care expansion, and quality public education." Stopping such research is the mission of this organization, which is

spearheaded by Greenpeace, Forecast the Facts (a green outfit focused on climate change), and the American Federation of Teachers.

The group's website directs student activists to a list of universities to which Koch foundations have given money, and provides a "campus organization guide" with instructions for how to "expose and undermine" any college thought that works against "progressive values." Students are directed to first recruit "trusted allies and informants" (including liberal faculty, students and alumni) and then are given a step-by-step guide on hounding universities and targeted professors with demands for records disclosure and with Freedom of Information Act requests. The AFT and the National Education Association devoted nearly a full day at a conference this month to training students on the "necessary skills to investigate and expose" any "influence" the Kochs have at universities.

This week Michigan State University released documents to student activists who had targeted political-theory professor Ross Emmett, director of the Michigan Center for Innovation and Economic Prosperity. His crime? Using Koch grant money to fund a reading group, called the Koch Scholars, that brings together students to discuss competing political economy ideas. The first two weeks were devoted to Marx, though the activists apparently couldn't tolerate an equal discussion of capitalism.

Art Hall, who runs the Center for Applied Economics at the University of Kansas School of Business, was forced last year to file a lawsuit to try to stop a state records request from student activists demanding his private email correspondence for the past 10 years. Mr. Hall's sins? His center got a seed grant from the Fred and Mary Koch Foundation, and he testified against green energy quotas at the state legislature last year.

As for those defenders of academic freedom and integrity, the American Association of University Professors several years ago defended climate scientist Michael Mann against a conservative group's demands for his records. Now the Kansas chapter of AAUP helped fund the students' demand for Mr. Hall's records.

These UnKoch tactics are spreading. In February, Right to Know, a California nonprofit opposed to genetically modified food, filed freedom of information requests at four universities, demanding correspondence between a dozen academics and outside agriculture companies and trade organizations. The Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting, a left-leaning organization, recently forced the University of Louisville to release information about the founding of a new Free Enterprise Center, partly funded by Koch money.

Congressional Democrats are simply getting in on the game, using the power of government inquiry to up the ante. Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin ran a campaign in 2013 against the free-market American Legislative Exchange Council, demanding information from its donors, trying to embarrass them out of funding ALEC. It worked.

Disclosure is becoming the left's new weapon. And it's shutting down debate across the country.