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Firing a blank in the culture wars

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For those deficient in their culture-war studies, a brief refresher:

Suspicions of liberal classroom indoctrination in public high schools and in university classrooms drive conservatives nuts. Oh, like you didn't know.

A 1999 expose, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses*, by Alan Charles Kors and Harvey Silvergate, stands as a modern indictment of politically correctness gone mad on college campuses. Among those convinced that liberal professors have strangled conservative points of view in U.S. college classrooms, it remains a brisk seller.

Web activist David Horowitz, meanwhile, has launched a virtual cottage industry attacking the antics of classroom lefties. A Horowitz brainchild - urging conservative students to record their professors' off-subject political rants as evidence of their propagandist bent - is proliferating.

There are many others hard at similar work. Lawyers for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education have sued (or threatened to sue) dozens of schools for attempting to thwart conservative political expression.

From time to time, even the American Civil Liberties Union still comes to the defense of speech-oppressed conservative students.

In sum, there are lots of avenues for parrying political proselytizing in classrooms, real and imagined. Some are clever; some are themselves controversial. But, by and large, most conservative culture-war strategies seem focused on ensuring debate, not stifling it.

At least until the Arizona Legislature got into the act.

Senate Majority Leader Thayer Verschoor, R-Gilbert, wishes to ban college and public high school instructors from espousing political views unrelated to subject matter. The measure passed through a Senate committee on Thursday, likely clearing the way for a full Senate debate.

That would be good. Unlike college and high school classrooms under such a law, the state Senate can blather on about any subject that pops into a senator's head.

A number of critics of Verschoor's Senate Bill 1542 have judged it overbroad. It could stifle a whole lot of perfectly legitimate, on-topic speech.

That's a good argument against the bill, certainly. By our measure, though, calling it "overbroad" gives Verschoor's

appallingly simpleminded, anti-free speech bill a lot more credibility than it deserves.

It's simply dumb. And, by our guess, unconstitutional to boot.

But we do hope people will talk about it.

Especially in classrooms.