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SUNY'S THOUGHT-POLICE

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July 11, 2004 -- State University of New York Chancellor Robert King has a major scandal on his hands at upstate SUNY-Brockport: The campus thought-cops have repealed the First Amendment.

King needs to reinstate it —*fast*.

Freshman Robert Wojich and senior Patricia Simpson have sued in federal court, claiming the school's racial- and sexual-harassment codes unconstitutionally restrict free speech.

In the name of battling "harassment," SUNY-Brockport takes aim at such actions as name-calling, "discussing sexual activities" —gee, did the '60s free-sex crowd become Victorians when they grew up? —insulting cartoons and, yes, "ethnic jokes."

Violators of such "offenses" are "subject to the campus judicial system."

Big Brother would be proud: Bad taste has been outlawed by timorous bureaucrats.

The plaintiffs happen to be College Republicans and claim that the very existence of the harassment code has been used by faculty members to intimidate their group.

But their political background is irrelevant.

No university —a place where free expression and speech should be valued above all else —can permit censorship and manipulation of thought.

Worse, King himself seems not to have a clue.

"The university strongly supports the First Amendment rights of our students, faculty and community members," said a SUNY spokesman Friday.

So far, so good.

Then: "The law permits certain limits on free speech —such as yelling 'Fire!' in a crowded theater," added the flack.

Wrong.

The law is permitted to prohibit *false* shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater" —a critical distinction wholly lost on Chancellor King, it seem.

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So let's clear that up.

To justify such a defense, Brockport needs to demonstrate that its speech codes are meant to protect students from imminent danger to life or limb. And that notion is patently ridiculous.

Then came the weasel words: "University policy prohibits commenting on pending or ongoing litigation."

Of course it does.

Otherwise SUNY might have to explain why it allows the thought-police to undermine the integrity of a potentially great university.

King must repeal the codes.

End of story.

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