

Bill could allow CSU, UC systems to consider race during admission

Schools would not give preference based on additional criteria

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DAILY SUNDIAL

A bill in the California Assembly could authorize the University of California and California State University systems to consider race, national origin and other criteria so long as no preference would be given based on these criteria.

The bill, introduced in February by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, D-Los Angeles, now waits for a hearing in the Senate Education Committee.

"Speaker Nuñez feels that it is important to make sure that all eligible high school students have a chance to go to college," said Alex Traverso, deputy press secretary for Nuñez.

AB 1452 would require UC and CSU systems to examine student enrollment over the last few years

and evaluate their progress in the number of enrolled underrepresented groups, Traverso said.

"If the numbers go down, the reports would make the Legislature cognizant of that," he said.

Voting on the Assembly floor was split along party lines, with Democrats voting in favor of the bill and Republicans voting against it.

"Given that (Proposition) 209 is in the constitution, it seems this bill would be unconstitutional," said Aaron Bone, chief of staff for Assemblymember Sharon Runner, R-Palmdale, who voted against AB 1452.

Proposition 209, voted into the California Constitution in 1996, bans race, ethnicity and gender as considerations for public employment, education and contracting.

Bone said the language in AB 1452 makes it unclear what exactly it is designed to do.

The segment of AB 1452 in question states that the UC and CSU would be able to "consider race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, geographic origin and household income, along with other relevant factors, in undergraduate and graduate admissions, so long as no preference is given, if and when the university, campus, college, school or program is attempting to obtain educational benefit through the recruitment of a multi-factored, diverse student body."

"How can you consider race, gender or ethnicity without making a preference at all?" Bone asked.

Dorena Knepper, director of governmental affairs at CSUN, said she made some inquiries about the bill when it was first introduced because of the language of Proposition 209.

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COURTESY OF ASSEMBLYMEMBER FABIAN NUÑEZ'S OFFICE

California Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez introduced a bill that could allow the CSU and UC systems to consider, but not give preference on, race, national origin and other new criteria in admissions.

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AB 1452

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"This bill serves the purpose to keep the bill in the minds of the people," Knepper said. "It is necessary to understand different points of view and important to maintain the importance of a diverse student body."

Traverso said the bill would do little more than place focus on the

issues discussed in the language of the bill.

"The universities would report the numbers gathered and present them to the Legislature, and maybe the Legislature could work on it," Traverso said.

AB 1452 became a two-year bill, a sort of holding pattern for legislation, when it failed to be brought up before the Senate and

the Assembly before the close of the legislative year.

Work is being done on the bill, and it is not in opposition to the constitution, Traverso said. He said they would like bipartisan support to push the bill forward.

"When the legislative bill was introduced earlier this year, the speaker and the parties involved worked on it," Traverso

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said of the bill's two-year status. "They decided more information and input should be gathered before it was further pushed forward."

The speaker has until January 2006 to advance the bill or it will be stopped in its current form indefinitely, Knepper said.

AB 1452 is reminiscent of recent bills presented to California voters. Ward Connelly, a strong supporter of Proposition 209 in 1996,

attempted an even more drastic approach to ban all such racial and ethnic data gathering through Proposition 54 in the 2003 special recall elections.

The bill was defeated by a 64 percent majority of voters, according to election data from California Secretary of State.

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