

Horne seeks ethnic-studies ban

Tucson schools targeted; bill would cut funds

By Pat Kossan

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Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne is pushing legislation to ban ethnic-studies courses from high schools, specifically the 22 courses offered at four Tuc-

son high schools in history, government and literature.

If Senate Bill 1069 became law, a district or charter school that allowed such courses would lose 10 percent of its state funds each month. The money would be returned when the district shut down the program.

Various bills are still working their way through the Legislature. **B3**

"The job of the public schools is to develop the student's identity as Americans and as strong individuals," Horne said. "It's not the job of the public schools to promote ethnic chauvinism."

At the last minute, Horne added two exceptions to his bill. Native American studies would be exempt because these courses are protected by federal law. Also exempt is any grouping of students based on academic performance, even if most of the students are predominantly from



Tom Horne

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one ethnic background. This would keep the mandatory four-hours-a-day language classes for English learners from running afoul of the law.

Sen. Jonathan Paton, R-Tucson, is sponsoring the measure.

Horne called ethnic studies "harmful and dysfunctional" and has tried for nearly two years to persuade Tucson voters to bounce the local school-board members who supported ethnic studies. The strategy failed, and Horne said

some board members want to expand the program to middle school. Independent filmmaker Ari Luis Palos, who lives in Tucson, and his production partner, Eren McGinnis, spent this school year in the ethnic-studies courses and plan a documentary. Students are on waiting lists to get into the courses at Tucson and Cholla High Magnet Schools, said Augustine Romero, who heads the program at Tucson Unified School District.

Romero also teaches one of the courses: U.S. Government and Social Justice. This course

teaches the functions of government by tracking the changes in court decisions and legislation that reflect changing U.S. attitudes toward minorities.

Romero said the district supports the courses for good reasons: They connect students to their cultural past and their roles in American history, including students with Native American, Mexican, Asian and African-American heritages. The courses heighten student interest and are structured to be relevant to their everyday experience. Data collected since 2002 by the Tucson

school district show students who take the courses perform better on state's AIMS test than students who do not take the courses. That fulfills the goal of No Child Left Behind, which is to raise student achievement among minority students.

"This legislation is very mean-spirited," Romero said. These courses "should be recognized and applauded, and people should be finding ways to implement this methodology, rather than attacking it because it doesn't fit into their narrow box of how things should be done."