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The people in general ought to have regard to the moral character of those whom they invest with authority either in the legislative, executive, or judicial branches.

John Witherspoon

Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Applicants Update

According to the Department of Education, thirty five states along with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have applied for the Race to the Top—[Early Learning Challenge](#) competitive grant program. As a result of the April budget deal, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in conjunction with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius received 500 million dollars to award to states that submitted the most promising early education improvement plans. In their applications, states were encouraged to outline plans to bring almost all early childhood providers under their supervision, establish an accountability mechanism, formulate a tiered rating and improvement system, develop teacher qualification and certification processes, and strengthen data collection and assessment strategies. Despite the lack of success of [existing](#) federally run early education programs, advocates for the program maintain that improvements in early education will “reduce crime, strengthen national security and boost competitiveness.” Detractors of the grant program contend that one-time cash infusions are not the best tool to achieve long term growth and stability. They also have serious [concerns](#) about the continuation of top-down educational policies that decrease local and parental control. The deadline for applications was October 19, 2011. As of that date, the aforementioned states and localities were required to submit their early education reform proposals to the Department for peer review and evaluation. Winning state applicants will receive grants of 50-100 million dollars to implement their proposals. The Department will be announcing the winners in mid-December and awarding all monies by the end of the year.

HELP Committee Member Reflects on ESEA

During last week’s hearing, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions ranking member Senator Enzi (R-WY) made a [statement](#) regarding his views on the latest rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (currently labeled “No Child Left Behind”). He hailed the proposal as a “good start” towards bipartisan education reform. Although he conceded that the bill was not perfect, he believes that the bill presents the best opportunity to make changes to the unsatisfactory No Child Left Behind law. During the negotiation process, he advocated a return to increased local control and a rejection of the “flawed belief that Washington can solve every problem in education if we only pass just one more law, one more regulation, one more program, and throw more taxpayer dollars at our classrooms.” In his view, increased reporting requirements, data disaggregation, parental engagement provisions, creation of a Secretary’s report card and the ability to close failing schools are favorable portions of the bill. Senator Enzi praised the “promising work” made by the Council of Chief State School Officers on the [Common Core](#) Standards Initiative. In his view, the President did have the authority to offer the NCLB waiver program but should not have been able to link the waivers to new requirements. In conclusion, he asked HELP committee members to refrain from offering numerous amendments or “poison pills” to the bill, since the necessary changes could be made on the Senate floor or in conference negotiations.

Houston National Cemetery Case Results in Favorable Decision

The director of the Houston National Cemetery, the second largest veteran's cemetery in the country, has drawn the ire from an array of veterans and religious groups for her attempt to remove all religious content from the cemetery grounds and burial services. In *Rainey v. Veterans Administration*, volunteer [veterans](#) groups alleged that the director removed all religious symbols from the chapel and closed the chapel and then used the facility for storage space. She also [banned](#) the use of the word *God* at burial services during invocations, the distribution of condolence cards with religious phrases, and ended certain honor guard activities such as the "[Thirteen Fold](#)" recitation. Lawyers on behalf of Pastor Rainey demonstrated that the director's actions clearly demonstrated a pattern of hostility toward religion. Texas Representative Ted Poe (R-TX) sent a [letter](#) calling for cemetery director Arleen Ocasio's removal. Federal Judge Lynn Hughes [ordered](#) the director to reopen the chapel, restore the religious symbols, and allow the veterans groups to continue to offer their services to the families of the bereaved servicemen.

FRC Action Begins Values Bus Tour

The FRC Action, an affiliate of the Family Research Council, kicked off its nationwide [Values Bus](#) tour on October 8, 2011. Tony Perkins, FRC president, stated that "we have invited the presidential candidates to join the 'Values Voter Bus Tour' so that they can speak directly to values voters about their plans to protect marriage, safeguard religious liberty, protect the rights of the unborn and restore fiscal sanity." The group will be touring states that are predicted to be swing states in the next presidential election, have upcoming critical Senate races, and those with upcoming marriage amendments on the 2012 ballot such as Minnesota and North Carolina.

Parental Rights v. Public Education

A stage play at a Connecticut high school caused a nationwide [uproar](#) after its initial performance on October 14. Hartford Public High School, which consists of four specialized divisions, allowed a local theater company, along with local college and high school students, to perform a musical that promoted the normalization of homosexuality, obscene lyrics, and a kiss between two boys. The parents of the students who attended the Nursing and the Law and Government divisions of the school were not notified of the play's content or given a chance to grant their children permission to attend the controversial play. Both of the principals realized the potential fallout from their decision to allow students to watch the play but felt that they were exposing the students to appropriate behaviors and lifestyles. One recalcitrant principal told local newspapers that he was glad that they had done it and that the students needed to be forced to deal with their feelings on the subject. He glibly dismissed the objections of the students who chose to walk out of the performance. The Family Institute of Connecticut sent out over 7,000 email alerts about this issue. Parents of the second group of students were allowed to [opt](#) their child out of the performance which resulted in about half of the students not attending the play. This latest attempt to by public school officials to purposefully indoctrinate children without obtaining [parental](#) approval is a disturbing trend across the country.

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACIS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Ten Commandments Display Under Attack](#)

[School Choice Victories in Louisiana](#)

[State Halts Release of Petition Signers' Names](#)

[Gay Rights Advocates Vandalize Christian School](#)

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