



**The Washington Flyer**  
**November 20, 2009**

*“The Christian religion... is the basis, or rather the source, of all genuine freedom in government... I am persuaded that no civil government of a republican form can exist and be durable in which the principles of Christianity have not a controlling influence.”*

Noah Webster

**AACS Meets with Education Leaders at Department of Education**

This past week Dr. Walton, Executive Director of AACS, and Maureen Wiebe, AACS Legislative Director, participated in a meeting at the Department of Education on the topic of private schools and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Attending the meeting were approximately 20 leaders from non-public school organizations and top leaders from the Department of Education including Carmel Martin, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, and Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement (the department which includes the Office of Non-Public Education).

The purpose of this meeting was for leaders in the Department of Education to hear recommendations from leaders in the private school community regarding the implementation of equitable services provisions for private schools in education policy, specifically the ESEA (titled the No Child Left Behind Act under the Bush Administration). Many private school groups discussed the importance of retaining and improving access for equitable participation for private schools in certain government programs, specifically programs designed to help disadvantaged students and to further the professional development of teachers and principals.

Dr. Walton expressed the importance of ensuring that equitable participation provisions did not jeopardize the autonomy and freedoms of private, religious, and home schools. He also spoke of our concern over the establishment of national standards as this would pose a serious threat to the autonomy of private education. Carmel Martin addressed this concern by stating that the Administration has no plan to mandate national standards, and that it supports “common standards” which are “benchmarks for college readiness.” Dr. Walton followed by stating our very real concern that what begins as voluntary “common standards” soon becomes required national standards, particularly when partnered with national assessments. The result is a *de facto* national curriculum. At the meeting, AACS provided the Department with a copy of the protective language from the 2001 reauthorization that we are urging them to retain in the new bill.

While there are some private school groups that are still deciding their position on national standards, most private school groups are in agreement that they oppose national standards. The Home School Legal Defense Association and the National Association of Independent Schools also spoke in opposition to national standards at Friday’s meeting.

The meeting was a great opportunity for AACS to actively participate in representing the cause of Christian education to the top leaders and policy makers in the Department of Education. Dr. Walton stated, “Many private school groups are primarily concerned about the size of their piece of the government-spending pie. We

need to make sure the Department hears from those of us who are more concerned about preserving our autonomy.” As discussion on ESEA continues, AACCS will continue to work on the behalf of Christian schools to ensure protections.

### **Battle for D.C. School Choice Still Continues**

As the debate on whether the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should be reinstated heats up in the Capitol, Virginia Walden Ford, Executive Director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, sent out a letter urging parents, students, and families to contact Representative Jose Serrano and Senator Dick Durbin, asking them to ensure the program’s continuance and to allow additional students to participate. Mrs. Ford stated, “We have fought tirelessly together for the past six months to save this program, generating more grassroots support for a school choice program than ever before in our nation’s history. And, while some elected officials who previously opposed the program have indicated that they support the program's extension, I’m worried that the winds are blowing in the wrong direction. This program is now in serious jeopardy—and we’re not talking a matter of months, we’re talking weeks or days before decisions are made.”

The scholarship program allows children of low income families to be given a voucher to be used to attend the school of their choice. [Evaluations](#) of the program published earlier this year found the program successful, not only academically but also with parental satisfaction. While children already enrolled in the program were allowed to continue their schooling in the school of their choice, [216 families](#) initially accepted along with many other prospects were told the program was over and their scholarships were no longer legitimate.

Rallies have been held throughout the summer and fall months garnering bi-partisan support and attracting many individuals into the school choice movement. Mrs. Ford reported that she has “worked with more than 10,000 families—and all of us know the benefits of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. We’re all fighting to save this program...attending events and rallies and vigils. They want to give their children the opportunity to realize their dream.” AACCS Legislative Director Maureen Wiebe also stated at a recent rally, “The Opportunity Scholarship Program has [offered choice to parents](#), and given many children an opportunity for better education. It’s very sad politics has gotten in the way of this program from continuing.”

While the battle continues for school choice in the District, many parents, students, and D.C. residents are not ready to give up. Mrs. Ford in closing stated, “Make no mistake: I am still confident we can win this fight. We’re not giving up now.”

### **Judge David Hamilton Confirmed**

The Senate this week voted on the President’s first appellate court nomination, David Hamilton, a U.S. District Judge. The Senate confirmed Judge Hamilton to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals with a vote of 59-39. The Administration boasted of the nominee’s credentials as a trial judge and former leader of the Indiana’s American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chapter. The Administration has indicated Judge Hamilton will be used as a model for future judicial nominations and expressed that he is able to balance the law with “empathy for real people with real problems.”

The greatest concerns, however, spring from his record of suppressing religious freedom as well as pushing the abortion agenda. While sitting on the bench, Judge Hamilton blocked the Indiana General Assembly from allowing the [opening prayer](#) to be read in Jesus’ name and began to censor prayers. He later allegedly deemed that prayers prayed in the name of Allah were “ok.” The Seventh Circuit reversed his decision. Judge Hamilton also blocked a waiting period for women who were [seeking abortion](#). The waiting period was designed to inform women about the risks of abortion; however, Judge Hamilton blocked the initiative claiming it was an “undue burden” on a woman’s right to choose.

### **Health Care Update**

As the Health Care debate ramps up in the Senate, many conservatives continue to be concerned about the life issue within the health care bill. Many concerns arise. But the most contentious issue, and perhaps the issue that will ultimately defeat the bill, is the issue of federally funded abortions. Since the passage of a pro-life amendment to the bill in the House, pro-abortion lobbyists and many pro-abortion members of Congress have determined that they will defeat any bill that includes the pro-life amendment, while pro-life members have stood firm on their opposition to any bill that does not include the pro-life amendment.

As all eyes now turn to the Senate, no confirmation has been given to include the same pro-life measure in the Senate bill. After nearly six weeks behind closed doors, the Senate's Democratic leadership released the actual language of the bill to all members of the Senate late this week, giving little time for members to fully grasp all that is in the bill before a vote is cast to proceed to debate. Not only are members concerned about the short time allowance to consider the bill, but they are also concerned about the [actualities within](#) the bill. Pro-life Senators along with several moderate Senators have made intentions to [oppose](#) the bill unless life is protected within the bill. Many pro-life groups are urging constituents to contact their senators urging them to oppose moving forward with the bill till all concerns with abortion are dealt with. Many other concerns still lie within bill regarding families, individuals, and small businesses; however, the abortion issue is by far the most portentous and concerning among many Americans and members of Congress.

### **In Case You Missed It:**

[“D.C. Board Blocks Marriage Referendum”](#)

[Majority of Americans Oppose Abortion in Health Care Bill](#)

[Will the White House Strip Abortion Restrictions?](#)



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