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“In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government ought to be instructed....No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people.”

Noah Webster

The President’s Back to School Address

As many students around the country head back to school starting next week, the President in a rather untraditional manner would like to address the students, pre-K through high school. While not many Presidents have done this in the past, President Obama’s address is accruing much criticism for pushing an unprecedented move by the Department of Education. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan distributed [a letter](#) to principals encouraging them to have their students watch the webcast as well as distribute “[study guides](#)” to teachers, administrators, and students to “prepare” for the speech.

According to the “[Menu of Classroom Activities](#)” distributed to students (PreK-6th grade) teachers are asked to encourage the students to “write down key ideas or phrases that are important or personally meaningful.” They also encourage the students to think about certain questions as they listen to the speech such as, “What is the President trying to tell me?” “What is the President asking me to do?” “What specific job is he asking me to do?” “Is he asking anything of anyone else?” After the speech the study guide suggests teachers ask the following questions: “What do you think the President wants us to do?” “Does the speech make you want to do anything?” “Are we able to do what President Obama is asking of us?”

The White House defends the opportunity for the President to “encourage kids to stay in school” and has expressed the contents of the speech will focus on “the value of education and the importance of staying in school as part of his effort to dramatically cut the dropout rate.” According to a White House spokesman, “It’s not a policy speech.” However, [conservatives and many parents are fearful](#) of what the President might say to [push his policies on children](#) around the country. Neal McCluskey, associate director of Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom stated, “In general, I don’t think there’s a problem if the president uses the bully pulpit to tell kids to work hard, study hard and things like that. But there are some troubling hints in this, both educationally and politically.” Even the White House took note and [changed the wording](#) on the “Menu of Classroom Activities,” replacing a suggestion to write letters about how they can “help the President” to how they can “achieve their short-term and long-term education goals.”

One school board member in the Atlanta area stated in a letter her concern over the DOE sending letters directly to principals as well as the failure to allow parents to have their children [opt out](#) of viewing the address.

It is very important to note that the DOE sent letters directly to the principals of every public school in the country – Completely bypassing the locally elected Boards of Education and the Superintendents... Here in Georgia, we start school early in August so although there is very little time before 9/8/09 – we have a chance of letting our parents know so they can opt out... But what about the school districts that start on Sept.8th? They have no time to let parents know so they can opt out.

Congressman John Kline, Senior Republican member on the House Committee on Education and Labor, also expressed concern and is calling for the President to [post his remarks](#) publically. “As you know, parents play a pivotal role in their children’s education. Just as parents are able to review a textbook before it is used or consider a planned field trip before children leave the classroom, public consideration of your remarks in advance of the live address would ensure parents can review them, make an informed decision about whether the material is appropriate for their children, and engage them accordingly.” The Congressman went on to say “While I commend the President’s focus on academic achievement and educational excellence, I believe this unusual approach to reaching out to our students would be improved if he provided parents and educators the opportunity to review the information in advance of the event. This would allow teachers and families to make fully informed decisions and engage with students on this topic as they see fit.”

It needs to be understood that the President holds the highest office in this country, and his efforts to encourage students academically may be arguably well-intentioned, but any promotion of policies as well as gaining support through the minds of children is not only ill-conceived, but rather alarming and dangerous.

School May No Longer Censor “God”

Noah Webster, considered the “Father of Public Education,” was never puzzled when it came to the Bible and its relation and influence in education. In fact, he believed that education should “Discipline our youth in early life in sound maxims of moral, political, and religious duties.” He also stated, “Education is useless without the Bible,” and endorsed incorporating the Bible in the classroom, suggesting, “The Bible was America's basic text book in all fields.” And while our nation was founded upon Biblical principles and education was traditionally taught using the Bible as the main text, today even the mention of God is no longer accepted in our schools.

Though Bible reading and prayer have been banned in schools for years, and every year more restrictions apply to the use of the Bible or even a mention of it, school officials in Tennessee went [a little too far](#) when they censored the words “Pray” and “God” in flyers posted around the Wilson County schools that promoted the National Day of Prayer and Meet You at the Pole events. In March of 2008, the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) stepped in to “affirm the religious freedom and freedom of speech for all students in the district” and filed a lawsuit against the district. The result was [a court order](#) which required censorship by the county schools to cease until an agreement was reached. Just this week, the county district agreed to a settlement which required them to do away with the censorship policy and to answer specific questions of constitutionality in any future policies which may be written as “replacement policies.”

According to ADF Senior Counsel Nate Kellum, “Christian students shouldn’t be censored for expressing their beliefs. They and their parents have the same First Amendment rights as everyone else.” He went on to explain, “When the school censored their posters by covering up references such as ‘In God We Trust,’ which is also the national motto of the United States, school officials were clearly treading on unconstitutional ground. After the court ruled against them, though, they saw the writing on the wall and consented to the court order so that no one will face such censorship in the future.”

Officials originally ordered the posters to be censored despite a disclaimer on each poster which stated “See You at the Pole is a student-initiated and student-led event and is not endorsed by Lakeview Elementary or Wilson County Schools.” While the court did issue an injunction in May which allowed for the posters to be displayed uncensored for the week prior to the event, many were disconcerted by the actions taken by the school officials and hope that with the consent to the court order students will not be challenged on their free speech rights any longer.

Vermont Shuns Marriage for a Handful

Despite the outcry from lobbyists and pro-gay marriage advocates to declare Vermont gay-friendly and allow for same-sex couples to benefit from their state of equality, few gay couples actually took advantage of the battle that they had fought so hard to win. In April, state legislatures overrode the Governor’s veto and became the fourth state to allow same-sex marriages. While the [law took effect](#) earlier this week, Vermont’s largest city, Burlington found only 3 same-sex couples seeking a marriage license. Other large cities including the state’s capitol [received zero](#) applications for same-sex couples.

Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council reasoned, “Again, we see that the push to legally recognize homosexual unions is not based on any need for the ‘benefits’ of marriage, or desire to ‘marry.’ Instead, it's about providing affirmation of homosexuality itself.”

Even Ben and Jerry’s got a little ahead of itself when it advertised a new flavor “hubby, hubby” in order to promote Vermont as being a state “[for lovers and lovers of marriage equality](#).” Beth Robinson, the leading advocate for the legalization of both civil unions and then same-sex marriages, believes there just was not the same “pent-up demand” for same-sex marriages as there was for civil unions.

In Case You Missed It

[“Marriage: What Matters”](#)

[Court Stands with Baptist Children's Home on Employer Rights](#)

[The NIV now Gender Neutral](#)



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