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I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.

George Washington

Race to the Top for the Districts Moves Forward

On August 13, the Department of Education (DOE) [released](#) the finalized application for the Race to the Top - District competitive grant programs. During the public comment period, the DOE received about 475 comments from stakeholders. Launched in 2009, Race to the Top, the Administration's signature education reform, has awarded over 5 billion dollars in grants through various competitions aimed at school improvement, comprehensive assessments and early learning. This latest iteration of the controversial program seeks to award nearly 400 million in funding to 15 or 20 applicants. Only those districts with a minimum of 2500 students and 40% of students who meet the poverty guidelines (those who qualify for free or reduced lunch) may apply for the grants. Smaller school districts may join with other districts to apply, even districts in other states. The DOE is encouraging districts within states to craft reform plans that incorporate the "four cornerstones" of improving teacher quality, school turnaround plans, student data collection, and standards and assessments. Priority will be given to districts that link student performance to evaluations of teachers, principals, and district superintendents by the 2014-2015 school year. Originally, points would also be awarded to those who crafted plans which included personalized learning plans, tracked students from kindergarten through post-secondary education, improved graduation rates, reached out to parents, and sought to form public-private partnerships. The DOE has removed the portions of the application that required school board member evaluations and personalized learning plans for all students.

Plans must have the signatures of the district superintendent, school board officials, and local union presidents (if there are any). Districts must inform the DOE of their intent to participate by August 30, and district applications will be due by October 30. All of the money must be awarded by December 31. According to one official at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, response to the program has been "anemic" since there is far less money available through this version of RTT. Rick Hess, esteemed *Education Week* contributor, noted that in a smaller area like Washington, D.C., the potential award would equal only 2-3% of the annual education budget. Furthermore, he noted that while some education officials would be pressured to apply for the funding, others would be slow to craft costly and comprehensive reforms when the potential award amounted to 1% or less of their budget.

Family Research Council Targeted by Gunman

On Wednesday, the Family Research Council, one of the leading advocacy groups for family values in the nation's capital, was [targeted](#) by a gunman allegedly for their stance on social issues such as marriage and abortion. An armed intruder posing as an intern was wrestled to the ground by security guard Leo Johnson and several others. During the altercation, Mr. Johnson was shot in the arm and was later treated at an area hospital for non-life-threatening injuries. DC Police Chief Cathy Lanier hailed Mr. Johnson as a hero for his actions. The suspect, Floyd Lee Corkins II, was apprehended by police.

According to several news reports, after the guard took away his gun, the suspect said, “Don't shoot me, it was not about you, it was what this place stands for.” An official at the DC Center for the LGBT Community, where the suspect had been volunteering for the past six months, denounced Mr. Corkins’ actions. The Federal Bureau of Investigations and other law enforcement have labeled the act as domestic terrorism and are interrogating the suspect to ascertain his motive for the shooting. In a statement, Focus on the Family President Jim Daly summed up the incident by saying, “Early indications are that FRC may have been targeted for its biblical views on social-policy issues. That is a chilling thought. No person or group of any ideological stripe—left, right or center—should have to fear physical violence for passionately articulating and acting on their deeply held convictions in the realm of public policy. That is the very definition of terrorism.”

Traditional Marriage Victory in Hawaii

Last week, traditional marriage proponents were encouraged by United States District Court Judge Alan Kay’s [ruling](#) in the case *Jackson v. Abercrombie*. In his 117-page ruling, Judge Kay demonstrated deference to the will of the people and asserted that “If the traditional institution of marriage is to be reconstructed, as sought by the plaintiffs, it should be done by a democratically elected legislature or the people through a constitutional amendment” rather than through the courts. The plaintiffs in the case argued that the state’s liberal civil union law did not grant them the same benefits as married couples. In this particular dispute, Governor Neil Abercrombie is in the unique situation of both defending and supporting the law. Although he supports same-sex marriage personally, he must defend the laws of the state. The plaintiffs plan to appeal the ruling.

Marriage on the Platform

For the first time in its history, the platform committee for the Democratic Party has included same-sex marriage and affirmed that the party supports a repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) states that marriage is between one man and one woman for federal purposes. Earlier this month, a one hundred person committee voted to include these issues in the party’s platform which is a general statement about the party’s priorities on a whole range of issues. In June, President Obama announced that his position on same-sex marriage had evolved into one of support.

In Case You Missed It:

CORRECTION: In last week's Washington Flyer article entitled “Liberty Counsel Defends Embattled Florida Pastor,” we mistakenly stated that “School officials threatened to revoke the church’s lease agreement after the pastor preached a message about the intolerance of those who oppose the homosexual agenda towards those who fail to share their views.” In later versions, we corrected the statement to read "School officials threatened to revoke the church’s lease agreement after the pastor preached a message about the intolerance of those who espouse the homosexual agenda towards those who fail to share their views." We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

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

[School Choice Surge Aids Christian Schools](#)

[Obama at Iftar Dinner: Religious Freedom Is Foremost Freedom](#)

[Fla. Pastor at GLBT Forum: 'Love Doesn't Mean We Don't Disagree'](#)