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"It becomes a people publicly to acknowledge the over-ruling hand of Divine Providence and their dependence upon the Supreme Being as their Creator and Merciful Preserver . . . and with becoming humility and sincere repentance to supplicate the pardon that we may obtain forgiveness through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Samuel Huntington, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Governor of Connecticut

Common Standards a Common Theme on Capitol Hill

Tuesday the House Education and Labor Committee held a [hearing on Common Core Standards](#) and how the efforts of this movement improve college and career readiness standards for students nationwide. Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, representing the National Governors Association (NGA), testified at the hearing that the "state-led common core process is intended to produce 'fewer, clearer, and higher' standards that are research- and evidence-based as well as internationally benchmarked." Currently 48 states have joined the [Common Core Standards Initiative](#) which was established by the NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Texas and Alaska have not joined this initiative.

In explaining the purpose behind the movement for common core standards, Gov. Ritter stated, "Our economy is now truly global, and the competitiveness of our education system must reflect this. To maintain America's competitive edge, all of our students need to be well-prepared and ready to compete not only with their American peers, but also with students from around the world."

Also testifying at the hearing was Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers. He also stressed the goal of common standards to be "internationally benchmarked, include both knowledge and skills, be evidence- and research-based, and prepare students for college and career." He continued, "This initiative is, and has been since its inception, a state-led, voluntary effort; and by following these principles we are developing better, higher standards that will support all students." In his remarks, he also alluded to the idea that "common core standards are only the first step in a longer reform process" and then further explained that common standards would also lead to reform in assessment and teacher training and preparation. This causes considerable [concern to many educational experts](#) and organizations, including the American Association of Christian Schools, that common standards are the first step leading to a national curriculum, national testing, and a national data system.

While there is bi-partisan support for strong academic standards and agreement that there should be consistency in these standards nationwide, there is concern among some educational experts and some Members of Congress that these common standards could lessen the local control that schools and communities have over the education of their children. There is also the danger that common standards will open the door for a national standard controlled by the federal government. In a statement released after the hearing, Rep. John Kline (MN), Ranking Member of the Education and Labor Committee, [made the following observation](#): "There is value in state and locally driven efforts to raise the bar on academic achievement targets. A voluntary system of academic content standards would offer local schools guidance against which they can measure their success

and foster greater innovation. But we should not impede or contradict those efforts by imposing limits on flexibility or rigid mandates that are not necessarily in the best interests of all our nation's diverse communities."

Cathy Allen, Vice-Chair of the St. Mary's County Board of Education in Maryland, also testified at the hearing and expressed similar concern: "[W]e do have some reservations with what appears to be greater coercion from the federal government in adopting such standards. As an example, the Department of Education's \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program will award competitive grants to states that have worthy school reform plans – including the adoption of college and career ready common standards developed by a substantial number of states. This Race to the Top component effectively would favor states using the CCSSO/NGA common standards. Additionally, the proposed requirements for Innovations Grants recently released by the Department of Education suggest support for similar consortia addressing assessments."

That same afternoon, the Department of Education (DOE) hosted an Education Stakeholders meeting on the topic of "College and Career Readiness." This was the final stakeholders meeting in a series of meetings that were part of the "listening tour" being conducted by Education Secretary Arne Duncan in an effort to learn of the needs and concerns of schools as the DOE moves forward on the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Interestingly, speakers at this meeting talked about common standards, improved assessments, stronger data systems, and early education as necessary components to improve the college and career readiness of America's students.

One of the speakers, Under Secretary [Martha Kanter](#) emphasized that in order for America to reach President Obama's goal of having the highest number of college graduates in the world by 2020, higher standards and stronger assessments must be part of new education policy. She also emphasized the role of early education in reaching this goal, making reference to President Obama's "cradle to career" philosophy. An example of how this philosophy plays out in educational policy is H.R. 3221, "[the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act](#)," the bill designed to improve the student loan system for college loans which includes \$8 billion for early education programs. This bill passed the House earlier this year and is now waiting a vote in the Senate.

To view the Stakeholders Meeting, [click here](#).

Links for the testimonies of the witnesses at the hearing on Common Core Standards can be found [Here](#).

Mini Omnibus Bill Poses Major Threats

While the fiscal year 2009 ended this past September, only 5 of the 12 appropriations bills have been signed into law. This week Democrat leadership combined all 7 remaining appropriation bills into a mini "omnibus" bill that contained serious family and life concerns. The FY10 omnibus bill not only strips funding from abstinence education programs and increases Title X funding, whose largest recipient is Planned Parenthood, but the bill also alters the Dornan amendment which prohibits any and all funds from covering abortions in the District of Columbia. Another concern with the bill includes the funding that will go to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: the money will cover only those students currently enrolled in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program and includes language to phase out the program.

The House voted on Thursday afternoon and passed the omnibus with a [vote of 221-202-1](#). The Senate is expected to consider the bill over the weekend, if they indeed remain in session. Senator DeMint joined many of his Republican colleagues in [writing a letter](#) to Sen. Harry Reid stating their intent to use every tool to stop government funding of abortions through the appropriations bill: "Democrats are not just trying to rush abortion funding through in their health care takeover, they're also secretly using our yearly spending bills to massively expand abortion on demand with taxpayer funding at the 11th hour."

Update: Senate Healthcare

Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (D-NV) is working [overtime](#) to get health care passed through the Senate before Christmas, but such an achievement is taking a lot of work and dealings behind closed doors to garner the 60 [votes](#) needed to end debate and in order to pass the bill. The “cloture” vote, the vote which ends debate, is being hailed by many as the “[key vote](#)” on health care as only 51 votes, a simple majority, is actually needed to pass the bill. Senator Reid allowed a pro-life amendment to be voted upon, but the amendment failed with a vote of 54-45. The amendment was introduced by Senators Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and consisted of the same language that was in the Stupak amendment which passed the House. While Senator Nelson is the only Democrat who has stated opposition to a health care bill without any pro-life language, many other Democrats are concerned with other problems in the bill and have continued to waiver on their support, forcing Sen. Reid to look to the Republicans for support in order to maintain 60 votes. Republican Senators Snowe (R-ME) and Collins (R-ME), the most likely candidates to support the health care bill, continue to voice concerns about the “public option” featured in the bill; however, Sen. Reid is working hard to reach a compromise with the Senators in order to attain their votes. If a compromise is decided upon and Sen. Reid attains both Snowe’s and Collins’s votes, the Senate could pass health care without Democrat Senator Nelson’s support.

If the health care bill passes the Senate, they will most likely not go to conference with the House. Instead, in an effort to speed the process and get a bill on the President’s desk before Christmas, Democratic Leadership has indicated that they will simply pass messages between both Houses to work out any [differences](#) between the bills to produce a final version. Many are concerned that the Stupak language may be stripped away in the final report that comes before both Houses for a vote. However, if the bill contains government funding of abortions, it will most likely be voted down in the House; and if the bill prohibits government funding of abortions, it will most likely be voted down in the Senate, causing abortion to be the sole stalemate in the debate.

In Case You Missed It:

[N.J. Senate Committee Passes Same-Sex Marriage Bill](#)

[Free Speech Wins Over "Hate Speech" in Canada](#)



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