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"All efforts to destroy the foundations of our holy religion, ultimately tend to the subversion also of our political freedom and happiness. Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them."

Jedidiah Morse, 1799

A National Standards Analysis for Education Reform

This week, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in a "state-led" effort released their proposed "[common standards](#)" for grades K-12. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative website, the standards were developed "to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce." Those supporting the common standards initiative argue that the standards are significantly different from national standards in that common standards are state-led, while national standards would be something that the federal government initiates and endorses. However, the Department of Education is using adoption of common standards as an incentive to states who are applying to receive funds through the Race to the Top program. Many are now concerned that the initiative is not only receiving an "unofficial" endorsement by the Department of Education but believe the initiative could also transform into national standards.

An excellent [policy analysis](#) by Neal McCluskey of the CATO Institute, *Behind the Curtain: Assessing the Case for National Curriculum Standards*, argues that national standards are not practical in a diverse population and that a free market approach to education reform that gives parents and students choice is the way to raise academic standards. According to the analysis, "The argument on behalf of national education standards is alluringly simple: set high standards that all American schools and students must meet, and all students will achieve at high levels. But actually setting high standards and getting students to meet them is extremely difficult." McCluskey finds the key to success "to be to give education funding to parents, allow schools autonomy, and as a result make schools respond to the needs and demands of parents and children." He explains that doing so "would solve the asymmetrical power problem, forcing educators to satisfy customers rather than use politics to get their way. It would prevent paralyzing political, cultural, religious, or ethnic conflicts that force lowest-common-denominator standards. And it would lead to standards that would be meaningful, but also sufficiently flexible so that unproven ideas could compete, and inevitable human failures would not be inflicted on everyone." McCluskey summarizes the analysis by stating, "Only a free market can produce the mix of high standards, accountability, and flexibility that is essential to achieving optimal educational outcomes."

While the Obama Administration is supporting the common standards initiative as they prepare to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Republicans introduced four principles of education reform they wish to be used as a guide in the reauthorization process. The purpose of the principles is to "identify key objectives for ensuring student success in the 21st century." Rep. Kline, who serves as the Republican Ranking Member of the House Education and Labor Committee, [expressed](#), "Republicans are

committed to a strong educational system that prepares our children for success. We have listened to parents, teachers, principals, and school boards, and we know there is not a one-size-fits-all federal solution to the challenges that face our schools.” He continued, “These four principles will help guide federal efforts to reform education laws that aren’t working well and ensure schools have the tools and flexibility they need to prepare their students for the future.” These principles include Empowering Parents, Restoring Local Control, Letting Teachers Teach, and Protecting Taxpayers.

Consumer Financial Protection Agency Threatens Nonprofits and Schools

In an attempt to bring about financial reform, the President has called for the creation of a Consumer Financial Protection Agency (CFPA). However, the creation of this agency could have a significant effect on the autonomy of non-profit organizations, including Christian schools. The Senate bill that would create the CFPA contains language that would require any institution, including non-profits (which include private schools), that offer any type of financial education to be under the regulations set forth in the bill. This “financial education” would include any type of class that teaches children how to save, or balance a checkbook, or develop a budget.

In an effort to protect non-profits from this regulation, the American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) signed onto a coalition letter headed by the Alliance for Charitable Reform (ACR) and expressed the following concerns:

In the current draft of the legislation, nonprofit organizations would be potentially covered under the Consumer Financial Protection Agency (CFPA) simply by seeking charitable gifts to support their missions, or by working to promote financial literacy as part of those missions... Further, nonprofits with missions encompassing any type of financial education – from teaching the basic financial literacy building blocks to a budget or check-balancing seminar – would be caught up in costly CFPA oversight because they provide “educational courses and instructional materials to consumers on individual financial matters.” These provisions have the potential to impact hundreds of thousands of organizations including schools, foundations, rescue missions, social services organizations, women’s shelters and many others.

We are certain that Congress did not intend to cover activities such as food banks for seeking donations, schools for teaching our children how to save, missions and shelters for offering the homeless a way to find self-sufficiency, or churches for providing budget balancing workshops in low-income communities. The final bill should be modified to clearly reflect this intent and ensure that the CFPA will not subject the nonprofit community to another layer of regulation, fees and increased paper work – at a time when they can least afford it.

While legislation that passed the House addressed concerns for non-profits and fundraising, “neither the current House nor Senate legislation addresses the concern that nonprofits offering the basic building blocks of financial literacy as part of their broader charitable missions may be swept into this new regulatory regime and bear the burden of any associated costs.”

AACS has sent the letter to the Senators on the Senate Banking Committee asking them to make the necessary changes in the language that would exempt our schools and other non-profits. In addition, several of our AACS state leaders helped in getting this letter to their respective Senators who serve on the Banking Committee.

White House Faith-Based Advisory Council Submits Recommendations

The White House Faith-Based Advisory Council [submitted](#) this week its 164-page recommendations to the President with over 60 “specific” [recommendations](#) included. The Council, which is made up of a diverse group of individuals, voted on the recommendations after a series of conference calls. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius stated, “I promise you this document will become an active action plan in the Department of Health and Human Services.” The recommendations included reforming the White House Office

of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, as well as “increasing the scope of interfaith service projects in cities and on college campuses” and “helping nonprofit groups ‘green’ their buildings.”

Perhaps one of the most contentious issues – discrimination in hiring – was not addressed. The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination has condemned the Administration for not making good on a campaign promise “to prevent social service groups that receive federal money from hiring and firing employees based on their religion.” However, White House officials have said that they will consult with the Justice Department before any action is taken.

Overall, however, the [recommendations](#) were welcomed and many believe the Administration will continue to work with the faith-based community to establish a good relationship. Stanley Carlson-Thies, founder and president of the International Religious Freedom Alliance, who worked with the Bush Administration to develop the original faith-based office and is currently a member of the task force charged with reforming it, stated, “It is a further development down the path of a very robust engagement ... that's carefully designed not to be biased for religion and against secular but to be very inclusive of all the faith-based efforts.”

Health Care Update: Is This Really It?

Democrats continue to scrounge for votes as the President headed back on the road campaigning for health care this week. Since the President’s encouragement to pass healthcare through a budgetary process known as reconciliation, Democratic leadership in the House are struggling to gain the 216 votes needed to pass the Senate version of the healthcare reform bill. Earlier this week, the Whip Offices of the Republican parties in the House and the Senate released a [joint memo](#) describing the hurdles the Democrats face in trying to pass the bill. In an attempt to bring unity to the Democratic party, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi called for all hearings and business meetings to be canceled on Thursday in order to meet behind closed doors to garner support for the Senate bill. Democrat Representatives have been urged to vote for the bill on promise that a reconciliation bill that addresses their concerns will be voted upon once the President has signed the original Senate bill into law.

However, many Representatives are leery of supporting a bill with only the promise that changes will be made. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) expressed this concern stating, “Members want some assurance that those items they have problems with are, in fact, modified before they vote for the Senate bill. I don't know that it's impossible, but it's difficult.” Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA) stated his concern, “So they're going to say, 'Okay, vote for this bill, because it would do X,' but under reconciliation, X may not make it past the parliamentarian's gate... We're not sure what's in it [and] we don't know whether it'll pass the Senate anyway.”

The greatest obstacle for Democrats hoping to pass the bill, however, still lies with the [abortion](#) issue. Rep. Bart Stupak, whose pro-life amendment prohibiting federally-funded abortions was not included in the Senate bill even though passed in the House bill, is standing strong in opposition to the bill along with 11 other pro-life Democrats. While this issue has attracted much debate, no real solution to the problem exists. If Rep. Pelosi, in an effort to secure the needed 216 votes, promises the pro-life Democrats that the abortion problem will be “fixed” in the reconciliation process, there is no guarantee that the measure won’t be stripped or will even be considered in the Senate. In fact, most pro-life Congressmen argue that the only solution to really “fix” the problem would be to scrap the entire bill and start over. However, many are concerned that a few pro-life Democrats will falter under pressure and make a deal with their leadership as was seen by Sen. Ben Nelson in the Senate last December.

ACTION: Individuals are asked to contact their [Representative](#) as well as the [Pro-Life Democrats](#) and encourage them to stand strong on Pro-Life principles and OPPOSE the Senate Bill.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Senator Introduces Legislation for the Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"](#)

[Wyoming Bible Colleges Escape Shut-Down by State](#)



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