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“The Christian religion is the religion of our Country. From it are derived our prevalent notions of the character of God, the great moral governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions.”

William Holmes McGuffey, “Schoolmaster of the Nation,” Author of the McGuffey’s Reader, 1836

AACS Co-Hosts U.S. Capitol Briefing on Education

On Tuesday, the American Association of Christian Schools joined the Home School Legal Defense Association and the Association of Christian Schools International in hosting a luncheon briefing in the U.S. Capitol on “Protecting Religious and Home Schools in ESEA Reauthorization.” The purpose of this briefing was to educate Hill staffers and other organizations about the importance of keeping in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) language which protects the autonomy of private, religious, and home schools, and also prohibits a nationalized curriculum, nationalized test, nationalized mandatory teacher certification, and a national student data base.

AACS President Dr. Keith Wiebe stated, “Christian schools operate according to a mission that allows them to provide religious and theological teaching while providing excellent academics in a healthy and safe environment. Their mission requires that they operate according to the dictates of their faith. For these Christian educators, the heart of education is truly the education of the heart.” Dr. Wiebe explained that private, religious, and home schools are successful because of their commitment to parents and their mission. The autonomy they enjoy is vital to their success and must be protected in order for this success to continue.

Maureen Wiebe, AACS Legislative Director, also had the opportunity to speak at the briefing and emphasized the importance of maintaining the language in ESEA that prohibits the establishment of a nationalized curriculum and nationalized test. She stated, “A nationalized curriculum would not take into account the autonomy of private, religious, and home schools that allows them to use a curriculum consistent with their mission and purpose. This would have a debilitating effect on the ability of these schools to continue providing a quality education that is in accordance with the theological, spiritual, or pedagogical nature that makes them distinctive. Specifically, the religious freedom of faith-based schools would also be jeopardized should they be forced to comply with a nationalized curriculum.”

The ESEA (formerly called No Child Left Behind under President Bush) is up for reauthorization, and the education committees in both the House and the Senate have been holding numerous meetings (see article below) on the content that should be included in the bill. While no legislation has been introduced yet, the Department of Education did release a [blueprint](#) of their agenda to outline their top priorities in the ESEA.

For more information on the briefing held Tuesday, please [here](#).

Senate Holds Hearing on Early Education

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee (HELP) held a hearing on early childhood education and its distinction within the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Congress has held numerous hearings on ESEA as collaboration begins with the Department of Education and the current Administration in order to reauthorize the act. President Obama has made several statements on the importance of expanding early childhood education through his “0-5” and “cradle-to-career” agenda. Senate Democrats have expressed the same sentiments in expanding ESEA to embrace the early education [agenda](#).

In his opening statement, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the HELP committee, [reiterated](#) the President’s call to expand early education by stating:

We know that learning starts at birth and preparation for learning starts before birth... ESEA reauthorization offers an important opportunity to help states and school districts ensure that more young children are prepared to succeed in school. We must find more effective ways of supporting them as they transition into and move through elementary school... Reauthorization of ESEA also gives us an opportunity to clarify and strengthen current law directing States, school districts and schools to coordinate Title I activities with Head Start programs and other early childhood development programs.

Witnesses who testified included, [Barry Griswell](#), President of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines; [Larry Schweinhart](#), President, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation; [Robert Pianta](#), Professor of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; [Henrietta Zalkind](#), Executive Director, Down East Partnership for Children, Rocky Mount, NC. All witnesses expressed a support for a focus on early childhood education in the reauthorization of ESEA.

Not everyone is fully convinced, however, that early education is the key to achieving greater academic success among students. In fact, recent studies released show little if no significant gains among students who have received publicly funded early education. A [study](#) released in January by Health and Human Services on the evaluation and impact of Head Start, a government funded early education program for low-income families, found that children within the Head Start program had “few statistically significant differences in outcomes at the end of 1st grade.” The study also found that “there were no impacts for 4-year-olds in the cognitive domain at the end of kindergarten.” The report further expressed, “there was no strong evidence of impacts on children’s language, literacy, or math measures at the end of kindergarten or at the end of 1st grade.” The results of the study led to the conclusion that “providing access to Head Start has benefits for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds in the cognitive, health and parenting domains... However, the benefits of access to Head Start at age four are largely absent by 1st grade for the program population as a whole.”

Policy makers should take into account all the research and data collected and should be hesitant to pour billions of tax-payer dollars into something that has such questionable long-term benefits.

Democrats “Jump the Gun” on Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell

In an attempt to “jump the gun,” liberal Democrats [pushed](#) forward a vote on an amendment to the Defense Authorization bill that would in effect repeal the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy as well as remove the law that prohibits homosexuals from serving in the military. Though the Administration has made clear its intentions to remove the policy that was first enacted by President Bill Clinton, officials have [halted](#) all attempts to repeal the policy until the Pentagon concludes and releases the findings from a study conducted regarding how the repeal would affect military readiness and cohesiveness.

That is until now. Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-PA) introduced his amendment, and Democrats are claiming that it is a compromise between Congress, the President, and the Department of Defense. This “great compromise” would essentially repeal the policy as soon as the findings are concluded. Many Republicans, however, opposed the compromise claiming the study is being conducted to see how and if the military can successfully transition with a repeal of the law during a time of war. Instigating legislation that would take effect as soon as the

findings are released would not allow for Congress to fully review the findings to see if the repeal is appropriate at this time.

Democrat Congressman and Chairman on the House Armed Services Committee Ike Skelton (D-MO) [opposed](#) the amendment. In a statement released this week, Chairman Skelton said, “My position on this issue has been clear – I support the current policy and I will oppose any amendment to repeal ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.’ I hope my colleagues will avoid jumping the gun and wait for DOD to complete its work.” Despite opposition from both democrats and republicans the amendment passed with a vote of [234-194](#).

Though Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen asked that Congress defer legislation that would repeal the policy till all the findings had been concluded, both have now issued their support for the amendment to the Defense authorization bill. The President has also approved the measure and has determined to support it despite what the findings of the study may be. Rep. Buck McKeon, ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee, [opposed](#) the measure stating, “we have a duty to honor that request and hear directly from our military personnel—and their families—before making a decision on a sensitive issue that directly affects them....Congress acting without that input is the equivalent of turning to our 2.5 million men and women in uniform, and an equal number of family members, and saying your opinion and your views do not count in this debate.”

Other conservative organizations are concerned the amendment will allow liberals to use the military to advance a radical, social agenda. Tommy Sears with the Center for Military Readiness [stated](#) that this amendment was “not a ‘compromise’ — it is a deal for repeal, and the price will be paid by the military, whose voices have yet to be heard.” The Center for Military Readiness has put together a [petition](#) that supports the military and states clearly that “military should not be used as a tool to advance the goals of gay activist groups.” The petition can be viewed [here](#).

National Legislative Conference

The AACS Legislative Office is looking forward to the National Legislative Conference in September, when many AACS state leaders along with administrators, pastors, teachers and students will convene in Washington, D.C. to discuss current legislation that can affect our Christian schools and ministries. The conference will also provide opportunity to hear from godly Congressmen and other national leaders who have been called to protect the religious freedom of our nation. This year’s theme will be “But God,” taken from the 26th verse in Psalm 73, “...but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”

Please mark your calendar for this year’s National Legislative Conference (September 13-15, 2010) to participate in the discussion of important issues facing our country, Christian schools, and churches around the nation. To download a registration form, please click [here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Why National Standards Won't Fix American Education](#)

[GOP Launches New Website: America Speaking Out](#)