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*“Whatever merit there is in anything that I have written is simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read me a part of the Bible and daily made me learn a part of it by heart. . . . To my early knowledge of the Bible I owe the best part of my taste in literature, and the most precious, and on the whole, the one essential part of my education.”*

John Ruskin, English Author

**NBC’s Education Summit Lacks Appropriate Solutions**

This week the NBC news network hosted a two-day education summit in New York City, titled “[Education Nation](#),” with the purpose of taking an [in-depth look](#) at the problems devastating our public education system and looking for solutions that would place American students back on top in academia. [NBC’s website](#) promoting the summit claimed, “National statistics show that 68% of eighth graders cannot read at their grade level; American students rank 25th in math and 21st in science compared to 30 other industrialized countries; and most college students are ‘non-traditional’—spending more than four years in college or enrolling well after high school. These are only some of the surprising statistics that prove it is more vital than ever to have a conversation about improving the state of education at all levels, from early education through higher education and beyond.”

The [summit](#) included interviews from President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, as they proposed ideas on how to transform America’s schools. However, many conservatives were not pleased with their solutions to the problems facing the nation’s education system. Instead of promoting a free-market environment to allow schools to compete and allow parents more choice in their child’s education, the administration and many of those represented at the summit simply reiterated that the solution was through funding and greater control, touting their plans to throw billions of dollars to the already broken system and create an unprecedented federal control over standards and regulations. Ben Boychuk, managing editor of *School Reform News* for the Heartland Institute, wrote his [frustration with the coverage](#) of NBC’s Education Nation.

NBC News this week is giving unprecedented televised attention to the crisis in the U.S. public education system. Unfortunately, the solutions the network is touting would mean more bureaucracy, more federal control, less accountability, and ultimately less parental choice.

Today Show host Matt Lauer spent half an hour Monday interviewing President Barack Obama about education, which both men agreed may be the most important policy issue facing the nation today regarding global economic competitiveness. Yet the president’s solutions, including \$100 billion in federal stimulus aid to states and another \$10 billion teacher union bailout, put more power and authority, not less as he tried to claim, in the hands of federal bureaucrats.

While the audience seemed to press on issues related to more parental involvement and school choice, the only comment made to the President during the summit came when an audience member asked the President if he

thought that his daughters would have the same “high-quality, rigorous” education if they went to a D.C. public school rather than the “elite” private school they now attend. The President responded by saying, “I’ll be blunt with you. The answer’s ‘no’ right now. The D.C. public school systems are struggling.”

While this would have been an [opportune time](#) for someone to ask or even comment on the President’s decision to eliminate the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, nothing was raised. While the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program was a huge success that allowed low-income students the opportunity to escape from their overcrowded, violence and drug infested assigned public school and gave parents the choice in their child’s educational future, the President proposed in his budget last year that the funding for this program be zeroed out, and essentially rescinded 216 scholarships that had just been awarded.

Robert Holland, Senior Fellow for Education Policy at the Heartland Institute, upset by the network’s complete failure to address the issue stated, “The kickoff of NBC’s week-long ‘Education Nation’ extravaganza indicated that this liberal-oriented network will devote little if any attention to the proven power of private school choice to bring about public school reform. Virtually all of the focus is on the potential of within-the-system change. The Today Show’s Matt Lauer, who was more cheerleader than hard-nosed interviewer, muffed an opportunity to press President Obama on why he snuffed out an effective voucher program in Washington, DC that was helping low-income families have the private school choice that his own family enjoys.”

While it is encouraging to see that the nation is finally tuning in to focus on the problems that are causing the education system in America to fail, Americans must be reminded that freedom is the best way for an institution to succeed. America’s education system has slowly lost that freedom over the years through government and bureaucratic control. It is time to afford parents their right to choose and allow the education system to compete in order to bring about the best opportunities for future generations.

### **Major Gap Exists in Americans’ Religious Knowledge**

This week, the Pew forum on Religion and Public Life released the findings of the “[U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey](#).” The survey made major headlines as media outlets picked through and found the most controversial finding: atheists and agnostics know more about religion than any faith group. The atheist/agnostic group did answer more accurately on the survey. However, many factors imply that atheists and agnostics do not necessarily know more about a certain faith than those who hold that faith. Alan Cooperman, Associate Director of Research for the Pew Research Center, explained the findings in more detail at a forum promoting the Public Broadcasting Service’s (PBS) new project titled “God in America.”

Cooperman explained the survey consisted of 32 questions that were separated into the following categories: The Bible, Elements of Christianity, Elements of Judaism, Elements of Mormonism, World Religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc), Atheism and Agnosticism, and Religion in Public Life. He analyzed that while it is true that overall atheists/agnostics scored the highest with an average score of 20.9 questions answered correctly, when it came to questions related to the Bible and elements of Christianity, white evangelicals came in second only to Mormons who averaged about 5.7 questions answered correctly out of 7 total. On average the Christian protestant group (white evangelicals, white mainline, black protestants) scored 15.7 questions correctly. White evangelicals were the highest scoring subgroup with 56% scoring 17 or more answers correctly.

Another interesting element of the survey was the impact that prior religious education played in the determining of how well an individual did. The survey found that those who had at one time attended a private religious school answered 17.8 of the questions correctly but were surpassed by those who had attended a private non-religious school (18.5). However, it was noted that the sample size of those surveyed with a background in a private non-religious school was only one-fifth the size of the group surveyed who had attended a religious private school, leaving a greater margin for error. The same is true of the atheist/agnostic group whose size would be significantly smaller than other groups. It was also noted that those who had

participated in a childhood religious education/youth groups scored better if they had attended at least once a week (avg. 16.6 correct answers) over those who attended only monthly/yearly(15.9) or seldom/never(14.3).

The findings overall suggest that although a supermajority of Americans claim to believe in God and are religious, not many of them know much of the history and doctrine that makes up their faith. According to a Fox news article depicting the religious [knowledge gap](#), “Over half of Protestants in the U.S. are unable to identify Martin Luther as the person whose writings and actions inspired the Protestant Reformation,” and “a further 45 percent of Catholics... did not know the Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine used in Communion do not merely symbolize but actually become the body and blood of Christ.”

In regards to [religion in the public sphere](#), “The single question most people answered correctly: 89% knew that according to rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, public school teachers cannot lead their classes in prayer. But only 36% of respondents knew teachers are allowed to teach classes comparing world religions, and just 23% knew that teachers can read from the Bible as an example of literature.”

### **Christian Higher Education Month**

On November 4, 2003, the U.S. House of Representatives voted and passed a resolution “recognizing the outstanding contributions of the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of Christian colleges and universities” and declared the month of October to be dedicated to promoting and encouraging Christian higher education.

This month is a great opportunity to honor Christian educators around the nation for their dedication to the cause of Christian education. To live in a country that affords the freedom to educate children from preschool through college not only on the basics of knowledge but on the tenants of faith is a blessing from God. Praise the Lord for Christian colleges and universities that have set their mission on giving students a quality education not only academically but also spiritually.

To read the resolution, please click [here](#).

### **In Case You Missed It:**

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

[The President Discusses his Christian Faith](#)

[Faces on the Arizona School Choice Supreme Court Case](#)

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