



The Washington Flyer
October 14, 2011

Each generation goes further than the generation preceding it because it stands on the shoulders of that generation. You will have opportunities beyond anything we've ever known.

Ronald Reagan

Senate Unveils ESEA Reauthorization Plan

Senator Tom Harkin, Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee, unveiled the latest [plan](#) to reauthorize the much maligned “No Child Left Behind” law. Ranking member Senator Enzi along with Senator Harkin and his staff negotiated for over a year to produce legislative compromises that satisfied both sides. Notable changes in the bill include the proposed elimination of the Annual Yearly Percentage benchmark and “failing” label for underperforming schools. While intervention plans for troubled schools would have to be formulated by state officials, states would now have five years to implement a turnaround strategy. Strategies can range from converting public schools into charter schools or, in extreme cases, school closure. The data requirements that were the hallmark of NCLB will still have to be collected, disaggregated into racial and socioeconomic categories and submitted to the Department of Education. Schools ranked in the lowest five percent for performance scores or racial achievement disparity will be on the short list to receive federal aid. Allowances will be made for those students with severe mental and physical handicaps. States will be allowed to develop their own standards as long as they meet the Department of Education’s college- and career-ready designation. Senator Harkin demonstrated his support for the president’s signature education initiative Race to the Top by including language that will allow further iterations of the program as long as funding is available. Although Senator Harkin signaled optimism about the bipartisan [proposal](#), education reform advocates question whether the plan will have the necessary support in the House to achieve final passage. House Education and Workforce Committee chairman John Kline has repeatedly stated his preference for a piecemeal approach to NCLB reform. Although NCLB was last reauthorized in 2007, it is unclear whether education reform will be addressed amid the various array of pressing fiscal concerns that are being debated in Congress.

Pro-life Measure to Receive House Vote

On Thursday, the House of Representatives [passed](#) H.R. 358, the Protect Life Act by a vote of 251–172. The goal of the [measure](#) is to close the loopholes in Obamacare that allow for the use of taxpayer dollars for abortion and to allow healthcare professionals to opt out of performing abortion-related services that violate their conscience. At the time of debate over the healthcare law, this concern was raised and language inserted to prevent this travesty. However, in the final version of the law, the language was removed in the Senate. Abortion advocates have waged a misinformation campaign against this measure by alleging among other things that its passage would lead to women being turned away from hospitals. Some claim that the healthcare law does not fund abortion. Pro-life advocates assert that the vehement [opposition](#) the bill has received demonstrates the fact that the healthcare law does allow for taxpayer-funded abortion. The White House Statement of Administrative Policy says that the President will likely veto the bill if it reaches his desk.

New York Clerks Forced to Violate Conscience or Lose Job

The [National Organization for Marriage](#) has launched an effort known as the Marriage Anti-Defamation Alliance to support individuals who face punitive action as a result of their traditional view of marriage between one man and one woman. Homosexual advocacy groups such as the Human Rights Campaign are increasingly [targeting](#) public figures who take a strong stand for marriage. Tactics include pressuring corporations to boycott law firms that defend marriage as in the case of [Paul Clement](#) or threatening legal action against those who do not share their views. Earlier this year, New York became the sixth state to legalize same-sex marriage. Now three clerks are facing [discrimination](#) because they have asked to abstain from signing marriage licenses for same-sex couples. Although accommodations could be made that would allow them to keep their jobs, two clerks have had to resign in the face of lawsuits against the towns in which they were previously employed. These cases along with many other similar instances involving wedding photographers, adoption agencies, bakers, etc., show a disturbing trend towards homosexual couples purposefully targeting and threatening legal action against a reluctant service provider when the couple could have easily found other providers who were willing and capable of providing comparable service.

Christian College Groups Face Discrimination

Vanderbilt University has garnered a firestorm of media attention because of the school's refusal to amend a problematic [policy](#) concerning student-led organization requirements. According to the policy, student groups cannot require their leader to hold or affirm a certain set of beliefs. Five student groups have been placed on temporary probation for their alleged violation of this provision. The groups, which include the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Christian Legal Society, maintain that the ability to choose leaders that share the beliefs of the organization is crucial to the group's mission and purpose. Dr. Carol Swain, who has written extensively on this topic, [warns](#) that policies such as the one at Vanderbilt have broad implications on religious liberty in our society. Although this policy is intended to prevent discrimination against students, only Christian groups have been singled out for their requirements and forced to amend their mission statements or be banned from campus. The school's refusal to allow student groups the right to require their leaders to adhere to the group's beliefs is a sad commentary on how far the Nashville-based university which was founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church has strayed from its original purpose.

California Consent Controversy

As the California legislative session came to a close last week, Governor Jerry Brown signed a flurry of bills dealing with a number of controversial issues. One bill, A.B. 499, lowered the age of consent needed for the human papillomavirus [vaccine](#) (HPV) commonly known as Gardasil. Students who are twelve or older can request to be given the vaccine that purportedly protects girls from some strains of the virus that results in a variety of sexually transmitted diseases. As one pundit opined, it is unconscionable that a school nurse is legally prohibited from giving a child an ibuprofen pill but can give a child access to a controversial vaccine or an abortion without parental permission. In a twisted bit of irony, Governor Brown also signed a measure that raises the legal age to 18 for those who seek to go to tanning bed facilities because of the possible cancer risks.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[School Choice Helps Students in College](#)

[Steve Jobs on Education in America](#)

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