**The Washington Flyer**

**March 27, 2015**

*“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim tribute to patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles.”****George Washington***

**Congressional Members Hopeful for ESEA Reauthorization**

Despite last month’s delay on the vote, Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (MN) has expressed his [intent](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/03/rep_john_kline_hopeful_for_vot.html) to pass the Student Success Act after the Congressional Easter break. Although the bill is virtually the same language that was passed in the House last year, it met a “perfect storm” the week it was to receive a vote. A combination of lengthy and contentious debate over Homeland Security funding and a viral blog post based on false interpretations of the bill created a political environment in the House causing the bill to be pulled before a vote could be taken. Furthermore, some conservative groups strongly oppose the bill, arguing that given the heavily Republican-controlled House a more conservative version of the bill should be crafted. ESEA discussions on the Hill this week included an emphasis on the fact that the bill does indeed prohibit the establishment and funding of a national standard and test, specifically naming the CCS, and also includes protective language for the autonomy and mission of private, religious schools. Interestingly, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)—a key group in establishing the CCS—was on Capitol Hill this week [lobbying](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/03/state_chiefs_to_members_of_con.html) in favor of ESEA passage. They purport that states need federal guidance through law rather than through waiver proposals that advance an agenda by this or a future administration. ESEA has been up for reauthorization since 2007, and Congressional Members are hopeful that with a Republican-controlled Congress a compromise will be reached to send to the President’s desk. Whether the President would sign such a bill is still in question. Education Secretary Arne Duncan this week published an [op-ed](http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/236690-america-has-no-kids-to-spare) in which he called for ESEA reauthorization but criticized the current versions under consideration in Congress. The Administration has called for an increase of $2.7 billion in funding for ESEA and an inclusion of early education programs in the new plan.

**Marriage and Religious Freedom Act Introduced**

Senator Mike Lee (UT) and Representative Raul Labrador (ID) plan to introduce the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act (MARFA), a bill that would protect from discrimination by the federal government all persons who believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. Specifically, the legislation prohibits the government from punishing an individual or individuals through discrimination in programs, grants, contracts and tax treatment because of a belief in traditional marriage. A [recent survey](http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF15B71.pdf) conducted by WPA Opinion Research and the Family Research Council shows that 81% of Americans support the freedom to live and work publicly in accordance to their religious beliefs concerning marriage. The American Association of Christian Schools joined several other conservative organizations in offering [public support](http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF15C93.pdf) for these bills and their efforts to protect religious freedom and the sanctity of marriage.

**Illinois Bible Colleges File Lawsuit Over Freedom to Issue Degrees**

Three Bible colleges in Illinois have [filed suit](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-illinois-bible-college-lawsuit-20150117-story.html) against the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), charging they are violating the First Amendment and the Illinois Religious Freedom Restoration Act by denying the colleges the ability to confer degrees on their graduates. As explained by the [Illinois Bible Colleges Association](http://www.illinoisbiblecollegecase.com/), the “IBHE prevents Illinois Bible colleges from operating and granting degrees unless their teaching and curriculum are approved by the State.” According to the IBHE regulations, the schools can offer “diplomas” or “certificates” for completion of their programs, but not “degrees” based on their collegiate curriculum. A similar suit was won in 2007 by HEB Ministries, Inc., home to the Tyndale Theological Seminary and Bible Institute, against the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

**Arizona House Passes Law Providing Tax Break for Religious Groups**

On Monday, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey [signed](http://www.azcentral.com/story/money/2015/03/23/churches-win-rental-tax-break-ducey-approval/70358076/) into law House Bill 2128, providing a new tax break for certain religious organizations. Under this new law, religious organizations that rent their places of worship would be granted property tax exemption. Proponents of the bill, largely Republicans, argued that this bill not only reinforces the separation of church and state but also makes the law consistent since property-owning churches are granted this exemption. Opponents argued that on top of costing the state a lot of money, the tax break actually goes to the landlord, and there is no guarantee that the exemption will be passed down to the tenants. Last year, former Arizona Governor Jan Brewer vetoed the same bill, claiming it would only intensify a tumultuous property tax system in the state.

**In Case You Missed It:**

[Weekly Market Update](http://wealthmanagement.ml.com/wm/pages/Research-and-Insights.aspx?Referrer=HomeL2) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](http://wealthmanagement.ml.com/wm/system/ViewFAPage.aspx?pageurl=jcb)

[Senators Cruz and Lankford Introduce Resolution to Protect Religious Freedom of DC Religious Schools](http://dailysignal.com/2015/03/18/cruz-lankford-move-to-protect-religious-freedom-of-d-c-private-schools-organizations/)

[Colorado Senate Approves Tax Credit School Choice Program](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/03/24/senate-oks-tax-credits-for-private_ap.html)

[How Republicans Should Respond to a Supreme Court Marriage Ruling](http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/03/how-republicans-should-respond-to-a-supreme-court-marriage-ruling)

[Bobby Jindal Introduces Plan to Replace Common Core in Louisiana](http://truthinamericaneducation.com/common-core-state-standards/jindal-releases-plan-to-repeal-and-replace-common-core-in-louisiana/?utm_content=buffer5e1fc&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

**Jamison Coppola: Legislative Director**

**Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst**

**Legislative Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003**

**Phone: 202.547.2991 Fax: 202.547.2992**