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"A country cannot subsist well without liberty, nor liberty without virtue."
Daniel Webster

U.S. Congress Debates Reauthorization of ESEA

This week, both Houses of Congress debated legislation which would reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. On Wednesday, the House of Representatives [passed](#) its version, the Student Success Act (H.R. 5), by a vote of [218 - 213](#). In an effort to reduce the federal footprint and restore local control, the Student Success Act eliminates 69 duplicative programs, provides public school choice options for low-income parents, denounces Common Core and prohibits the establishment of a national standard and test, and retains protective language for private, religious, and home schools. The bill received mixed support from conservatives, with some praising the steps taken to reign in the federal government while others charged it does not go far enough in restoring local control and providing choice to parents. Throughout the week, the Senate also debated its version of ESEA, the Every Child Achieves Act (S. 1177), hailed as a bipartisan effort with the support of key Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate. This bill eliminates the adequate yearly progress standard and allows states to develop their own accountability system, yet it also maintains the federal testing schedule and includes expansion of funding for early education projects. Despite efforts of school choice advocates to gain inclusion of Title 1 portability that would also include private school options, neither the House nor Senate approved such a measure. ESEA has been due for reauthorization since 2007, and this is the first time that both Houses of Congress have considered a reauthorization simultaneously. As the legislation from the House and Senate have key differences, a conference agreement will have to be reached should both Houses have successful passage. The White House released a [Statement of Administrative policy](#) which outlined what changes would need to be made before the president would sign a bill into law. While the AACCS has historically been neutral on ESEA, we are pleased that protective language for faith-based schools has been retained in both versions of ESEA; however, we have expressed concerns regarding the inclusion of funds to expand early education programs and the efforts to include anti-bullying language as a means to include LGBT issues in the bill.

National Leaders Fight for Religious Freedom in Wake of Marriage Decision

Since the Supreme Court's decision which legalized gay marriage, much concern has been voiced that the ruling will have negative ramifications for society, for children, for the family unit, and also for religious freedom. Over 100 religious leaders signed a document titled "[Here We Stand](#)" which gives a bold yet gracious declaration of their commitment to follow the teaching of marriage as given in the Bible and to dissent from the Supreme Court's ruling. Some [state government leaders](#), concerned that the ruling threatens religious freedom, have already begun taking steps to ensure that people of faith in their states are protected from over-reaching government actions or lawsuits as a result of the ruling. Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed into law a bill that was passed by the Texas state legislature that protects any clergy from lawsuits for refusing to perform the wedding for a same-sex couple. Kansas Governor Sam Brownback this week issued an executive order that protects not only clergy but also religious organizations that operate according to a belief in the biblical

definition of marriage. Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal issued two executive orders—one to protect pastors, and one to protect clerks who decline to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples based on religious convictions regarding marriage. Additionally, 15 state attorney generals (WV, AL, AZ, AR, GA, ID, KS, LA, NE, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, WI) wrote a letter to Congressional leadership expressing grave concern over the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that adhere to a belief in marriage between one man and one woman and urged Congress to take steps to ensure the IRS cannot abuse its power by penalizing groups who operate according to a belief in natural marriage. Several conservative organizations, [including the AACS](#), are also urging Congress to pass the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA), which would prohibit the government from discriminating against individuals or organizations that act and operate according to a belief in natural marriage.

Ohio Pulls Out of Common Core Testing

Ohio is the latest state to [withdraw](#) from PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers), taking the number of states participating in the Common Core testing consortium from 25 in 2011 down to only 11. Last week, Governor John Kasich signed into law the budget compromise which prohibited further funding for the PARCC test (the state spent \$26 million last year on PARCC) and required the Ohio Department of Education to name a replacement test. The decision to withdraw was made after months of complaints from educators and parents about problems with the testing technology and too much time being taken away from students' learning. Students were reportedly spending 10–11 hours on the tests for English and math. Although PARCC officials announced they would decrease the test time by 90 minutes, Ohio state officials, who were hoping for a time cut by 50%, find the test still too long. Ohio will still follow the Common Core Standards, but the students will be tested with math, English, science, and social studies assessments from the American Institute of Research (AIR). Arkansas is also considering a withdrawal from PARCC.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[UK Looking to Ban Smacking](#)

[Struggle Over Same-Sex Marriage's Religious Liberty Ramifications Begins](#)

[Protecting Your Ministry](#)

[Pro-Life Victory: California Assisted Suicide Bill Dies](#)

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