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President Obama's Education Policy Takes Shape

Although the economy has made the most headlines since President Barack Obama took office four months ago, education is another of the new administration's highest priorities. New policies and changes are already going forward, and together with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Obama has unveiled many new aspects of his vision for American education.

In an important speech on March 10 to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., President Obama affirmed some of his highest education priorities: expanding preschool, promoting college attendance, and financing public education in states with large infusions of federal dollars.

Obama has drawn praise from education reformers for his support of charter schools, since the largely Democratic National Education Association (NEA) teachers union has opposed charters. The past few years have seen a turning of the tide,

and more and more prominent Democrats now believe that charter public schools are a good idea. Obama's stance, which he reiterated in his March 10 speech, is less a daring departure from party norms than an acknowledgement of what is now widely accepted, that good charter schools can encourage innovation and circumvent some of the most glaring inefficiencies of traditional public schooling. Even Bill Clinton supported charters when the charter school movement was in its infancy.

One opinion that actually does set the president in opposition to one of his main constituencies is his support for merit pay. The NEA's Annual Convention booed Obama in 2007 and 2008 when he mentioned performance-based pay. Obama reiterated his support for that reform in his speech to Hispanic business leaders, saying, "It's time to start rewarding good teachers, stop making excuses for bad ones." Randi Weingarten, president of the nation's second-largest teachers union, the

AFT, recently told *Education Week* that her union is willing to discuss merit pay. "I know that these conversations sometimes are uncomfortable for us to have, but we're willing to have them," said Weingarten. Anne T. Wass, president of the NEA's Massachusetts affiliate, warned that merit pay proposals

would have to be quite creative to win the union's support. "If it means paying individual teachers based on student test scores, . . . we would have a hard time ever compromising on that," said Wass.

Obama mentioned one policy goal on March 10 that he hadn't identified on the campaign trail: the creation of national education standards, consistent across all 50 states. Many conservatives oppose this goal since it would further erode state and



Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

local control of education.

Obama's aides made a few notable errors in the speech's preparation. The president lamented that American 8th-graders had "fallen to ninth place" in math compared to their international peers. U.S. 8th-graders did indeed place ninth in the 2008 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, but this represents a significant climb in the rankings over the past decade. In 1999, the U.S. ranked 19th out of the 38 nations in the study, and in 2003, the U.S. ranked 15th. Obama also lamented that the high school dropout rate has "tripled in the past 30 years," but according to Department of Education figures, the dropout rate has actually declined by one-third.

On the subject of college attendance, Obama expressed his strong desire to raise college attendance. (See *Education Reporter*, April 2009.) In this speech, he stated his goal that by 2020 the U.S. will have "the highest proportion of college graduates in the world." As Factcheck.org pointed out, however, this goal would be fairly easy to achieve. The U.S. already has the second-highest proportion of college graduates, with Norway in the lead by just one percentage point.

Increasing School Time and Influence

A policy goal to which Obama has paid much more attention since his inauguration is lengthening the school day and year. Obama mentioned this controversial measure in his March 10 speech. Obama's Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, made some shocking statements to the same effect on April 7 in Denver: "I fundamentally think that our school day is too short, our school week is too short and our school year is too short," he told an audience of 400 middle- and high-school students. "You're competing for jobs with kids from India and China. I think schools should be open six, seven days a week; eleven, 12 months a year," he said.

In an interview with Charlie Rose, Duncan also elaborated on his vision for schools to become "community centers" open 12-14 hours a day and providing health care, art classes, mentoring, programs for parents, and even "potluck dinners" for community members. Duncan's vision is explicitly for public schools to fill

(See *Education Policy*, page 4)

Seven-Year-Old's Tragic Death Exposes Over-Prescription of Dangerous Drugs

The suicide of a seven-year-old boy last month in Broward county, Florida raises again the issue of overmedication and dangerous mis-medication of young children. Gabriel Myers was a foster care child who had been prescribed four different psychotropic drugs. Only one of the drugs was officially approved for use in children, and two of the drugs carried the Food and Drug Administration "black box" warning label that warns doctors of an increased risk for suicide in children and teens who take the drugs.

In 2005, following a series of *Miami Herald* stories on the over-prescription of psychotropic drugs to foster care children, the Florida legislature passed a law attempting to address the problem of

overmedication. Four times a year, the state Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) now evaluates how Florida doctors prescribe psychiatric drugs to children who are on Medicaid. AHCA looks for the doctors who most frequently prescribe psychiatric drugs, or who prescribe potentially dangerous combinations of drugs. Of the 17,000 doctors in the state who prescribe for children on Medicaid, AHCA flags between 300 and 450 each quarter. AHCA has flagged Gabriel Myers's psychiatrist, Dr. Sohail Punjwani, each quarter since the program's inception in 2006.

Gabriel was one of the millions of American children taking prescription drugs that are not officially approved for

pediatric use, through doctors' practice of "off-label" prescribing. Once the FDA approves a drug for one age group or type of treatment, doctors can and often do prescribe it "off-label" for other groups or conditions. 6.7% of American children take at least one psychotropic drug, and three-quarters of the time their drug use is off-label.

(See *Tragic Death*, page 4)



Gabriel Myers

Democrats in Texas Legislature Want to Strip Authority from State Board of Ed

In March, the Texas Board of Education made several significant changes to the state's science curriculum standards (See *Education Reporter*, April 2009). Defenders of the changes said they protected critical thinking, free inquiry, and the scientific method in Texas public schools, by asking schools to help students to examine "all sides of scientific evidence . . . so as to encourage critical thinking by the student." Critics of the new standards objected to the fact that they could lead teachers or students to question evolution, which these critics want to be taught dogmatically in Texas schools.

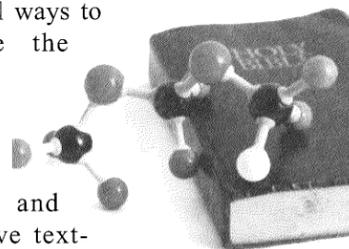
The board's deliberations and conclusions attracted national attention, espe-

cially because Texas, as the country's second-largest textbook market, influences the publishing industry that serves all 50 states. Texas is one of about 20 states that require local school districts to choose textbooks from lists approved by the state board (if the districts are to use state money for the books), so the board's textbook approval is just as important as its creation of curriculum standards.

The *New York Times* editorial page attacked the board and the new standards, and several other important liberal voices followed suit. The controversy spurred attempts by Texas legislators to strip authority from the board of education. Democrats in the Texas House proposed

several ways to negate the board's power to set curricula and approve textbooks, and have now sent H.B. 710, which would subject the Board to review by the Sunset Advisory Commission, to the state Senate. This advisory commission could severely limit the board's powers, making the decision-making process on textbooks and curriculum less accountable to voters, placing such decisions in the hands

(See *State Board of Ed*, page 4)



EDUCATION BRIEFS

An influential government-appointed panel advised depression screening for all teens, even those with no symptoms of depression. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force wants doctors to use questionnaires to screen all American teenagers at least once a year. "You will miss a lot [of depression] if you only screen high-risk groups," said Dr. Ned Calonge, who chairs the task force. (*Pediatrics*, April 2009)

The U.S. Supreme Court heard a case concerning the constitutional rights of a 13-year-old girl whom school officials strip-searched after a classmate accused her of having ibuprofen at school. Ibuprofen is the painkiller commonly sold as Advil or Motrin. The girl, Savana Redding, was humiliated under Safford Middle School's bizarre zero-tolerance policy. (*Washington Post*, 4-11-09)

An insightful letter to the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that the recession is not the only factor in families' saving or not saving for their children's college educations. "It is a fact that the current system of college tuition and financial aid formulas punishes good economic behavior," writes Kevin Poehlmann. Families with savings pay full tuition, while families who have not saved receive deep discounts. "Not only does this create a massive disincentive for savings on a national basis (why should you save if all the economic benefits get passed to the college and then on to the nonsavers in the form of lower tuition and grants), but it is fundamentally unfair and essentially a confiscatory tax." (*Wall Street Journal*, 4-7-09)

Brown University struck Columbus Day from the school calendar, and will celebrate "Fall Weekend" instead. Students and faculty will have the day off on Columbus Day, but without making reference to the explorer. The student newspaper found that two-thirds of students favored changing the holiday's name. (Fox News, 4-8-09)

(See Briefs, page 4)

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Web site: <http://www.eagleforum.org>
E-mail: education@eagleforum.org

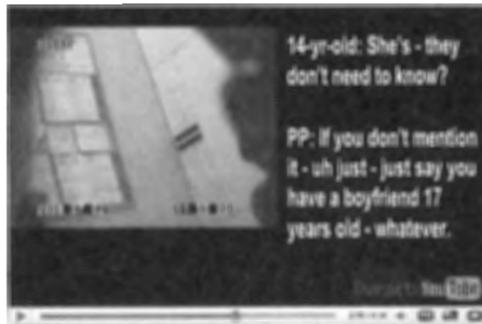
Planned Parenthood Suppresses Evidence of Statutory Rape

Live Action, a UCLA-based student group, is conducting a nationwide undercover investigation of abortion provider Planned Parenthood's systematic suppression of evidence of statutory rape. The group's Mona Lisa Project has caught counselors at six different Planned Parenthood clinics violating state laws that are meant to protect young girls.

The Mona Lisa Project's latest undercover video shows Live Action president Lila Rose, a 20-year-old UCLA student, meeting with a counselor at Planned Parenthood in Memphis, Tennessee. Rose told the counselor that she was 14 years old and was pregnant after sex with her 31-year-old "boyfriend." Rose said that she needed a secret abortion, bypassing Tennessee's parental consent requirement, to prevent her parents from finding out about her sexual relationship with this much older man. Tennessee Code 37-1-605 requires health care professionals to

immediately report suspected statutory rape or other sexual abuse of minors.

"Look, if we keep up this conversation I'm gonna have to talk to my manager and yeah, [your boyfriend]'s gonna get in trouble," the Planned Parenthood counselor tells Rose in the video. "I'm not gonna tell anybody, OK?" she promises, asking Rose also to keep the conversation secret. She goes on to advise Rose to lie to



A Live Action undercover visit to a Planned Parenthood in Memphis, TN

the judge in order to obtain the necessary exemption from Tennessee's parental consent law for abortion. "Don't mention it. Just say you have a boyfriend 17 years old . . . whatever."

"This is the sixth clinic we have recorded that manipulates the law and covers up sexual abuse," says Lila Rose. "Planned Parenthood's abortion-first mentality makes it operate as an advocate for terrible crimes against children. What more do authorities need to see before holding this organization accountable for its institutionalized indifference to statutory rape and sexual abuse of children?" (<http://liveaction.org/memphis/>)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



Tax Credits for Scholarships to Private School are on the Rise

"We know what is not working," Kevin P. Chavous of Democrats for Education Reform reminded listeners at a recent forum on school choice. The District of Columbia, where Chavous served as a city council member, demonstrates some of the most disappointing education outcomes in the nation, despite spending \$26,555 per student this year. "Anything that is remotely different will get pushback from the status quo, even if the status quo isn't serving children," said Chavous.

Chavous and other reformers met in D.C. to discuss the growth of tuition tax credits for private schooling, a school choice reform some are calling "neo-vouchers." Six states have begun to offer tax credits to individuals who donate money to nonprofit, privately run programs that give tuition scholarships for private schooling. The six states are Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Some of these states also offer such tax credits to businesses.

Kevin G. Welner, author of *NeoVouchers: The Emergence of Tuition Tax Credits for Private Schooling*, estimates that

100,000 students are now receiving financial aid to attend private school under state tax-credit policies. Less than half that number receive tuition assistance through publicly financed voucher programs.

Arizona, Florida, and Georgia offer tax credits equal to 100% of the amount donated. The other states credit between 65% and 90% of the amount donated.

Tuition tax credits offer several important advantages over voucher programs. Some conservatives fear that voucher programs might ultimately give the government more control over private schools, since tuition scholarship money comes out of public coffers. Voucher programs also appear to be more vulnerable to legal challenges than tax credits are. In 1999, the Arizona Supreme Court found no problem with one of that state's tuition tax credit programs, whether the donated money allowed students to attend secular or religious private schools. Opponents of vouchers have repeatedly attacked the use of vouchers at religious schools. Since parents, not government entities, select the school their children will use a voucher (See *Tax Credits*, page 3)

Book of the Month



Christianity: Lifeblood of America's Free Society (1620-1945), by John A. Howard, Summit Press, 2008, 136 pp., \$12.95

World War II hero Dr. John Howard has served in the federal government, in higher education, and as senior fellow at the Howard Center on Family, Religion, and Society. A member of the Greatest Generation, Howard writes persuasively in this book about the high ideals of service, duty, and sacrifice that enabled Americans of the 1940s to pull together and defeat the Axis powers.

In contrast to Howard's childhood and the rest of America's history until quite recently, students today are "cheated by a society that has not provided them with an understanding and appreciation of human grandeur," writes Howard. These students "know next to nothing about the record of men and women whose labors and sacrifices have made us proud to belong to the human race. . . . In their schooling, in their homes, in their entertainment, the concept of ennobling obligation is as unfamiliar to them as Egyptian hieroglyphics." When young people never encounter any ideals worth attaining to, it is little wonder that so many are self-centered, shallow, and unwilling to work hard or serve others.

Christianity: Lifeblood of America's Free Society (1620-1945) tells the history of Christendom in America, and how Christian doctrine and ideals helped to create a cooperative and peaceable society. Beginning with the Pilgrims, Howard traces the religious life of America through the First Great Awakening, the founding of the nation, George Washington's leadership, 19th-century America, and up through the "'ought' culture" of duty that carried the United States to victory in World War II. Howard ends each chapter with a few pages of aptly chosen, fascinating, and often inspiring quotations.

Howard issues a rousing call for a return to the ideals, arising from a Christian worldview, that made America great. He points to the Templeton and Ingersoll Prizes as exemplary efforts to motivate and reward great art that invokes these high ideals. Howard cautions conservatives against losing hope. "It is commonly supposed that you cannot turn back the clock, that social change, like the genie that can't be stuffed back into the bottle, simply cannot be reversed. Like many other popular beliefs this one is not true," he writes. Howard's book lights the way forward with its portrayal of true greatness: humility, righteousness, useful work on behalf of others, and self-sacrifice for the greater good.

FOCUS: Why Not Manage Universities, Mr. President?

by Paul Kengor

I hear it again and again, even from some pro-business conservatives:

Hey, I have no sympathy for AIG and the automakers and the banks. When you take government money, you can expect the government to tell you what to do. Besides, some of these companies are wasteful, charge too much, and their salaries are too high.

Well, if that's so, then why doesn't the government intervene to run our universities, which consume huge amounts of government money? Why don't President Barack Obama and the Democratic Congress dictate marching orders to university presidents? Why not fire the bad ones? Why aren't Barney Frank and Chris Dodd calling in provosts to explain themselves?

Think about it: Few things in our society are as costly as college education. From the moment parents look into their newborn's eyes, they begin saving for college — the single greatest expense in their child's life. Entire life savings are dumped into college educations. Even then, that's not enough; student loans, with interest, are necessary.

My master's degree alone cost me so much — after my parents poured everything into undergraduate educations for my brother, sister, and me — that it took ten years at almost \$1,000 per month to pay it off. Homes in California are bargains compared to our nation's colleges. The cost of a degree is obscene.

And what about the product — assuming the product graduates? Economically speaking, few graduates will achieve the hourly salary of their professors. Educationally speaking, these degreed citizens perform miserably in basic civic and economic literacy. (Check out the recent survey by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, at www.isi.org.)

And yet, consider the salaries of those running these universities, particularly those accepting the most government

funding. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, 59 public-university presidents received salaries exceeding \$500,000 in 2007-8, up from 43 the previous year — a healthy salary jack while many parents grappled with job losses.

Over at Barack Obama's and Bill Ayers's alma mater, Columbia University, President Lee C. Bollinger made \$1,411,894 last year. John Sexton at NYU collected \$1,324,874. Northwestern's Henry S. Bienen scraped by with \$1,742,560. And Amy Gutmann of Penn raked in \$1,088,786 — a staggering 40% raise from the previous year, enough to make a Big Oil CEO green with envy.

And what about the Keynesian advising President Obama to deficit-spend our tax dollars to “prime the pump” during the recession? When Lawrence Summers recently left Harvard, he received a \$2-million severance. That was on top of his annual salary of \$714,005, not to mention his wife's salary (as a literature professor) of \$179,056. Did I mention that Harvard provided the couple with a home?

Here's a question for Senator Chuck Schumer's staff: Have you compared the wage of these folks to the custodians who clean their offices? How about professors in Feminist Studies at Cal-Berkeley or at Columbia Teachers College vs. the stiffies who prepare their food in the cafeteria? The typical tenured professor spends under ten hours per week in the classroom, and gets at least five full months of paid vacation. No one, from the little library lady to a GM fat-cat, enjoys those perks.

Talk about “Two Americas.” If you boys on Capitol Hill want to fan the flames of class warfare, this is a tinderbox.

And yet, after all that, after taking tens of thousands of dollars per year from debt-ridden students and parents, on top of boatloads of government money, these colleges are screaming that they are broke. How can this be? Who's responsible? Why isn't Congress demanding hearings?

And I ask liberals: What could be as un-progressive as a mom and dad in Iowa, with a combined income under \$60,000,

sending their daughter to an elite Northeast university — with their life savings not enough — to float a bunch of Ph.D.s who've accumulated more cash in ten years than “mom and dad” in a lifetime?

So, why isn't President Obama reining in our colleges? Why isn't Nancy Pelosi demanding accountability?

Alas, here's the dirty little secret: Liberal Democrats see no reason to investigate universities. Why? Because colleges serve as the popular front for advancing the left's agenda. They are essentially recruiting grounds for Democratic Party voters and activists.

Our universities are the most monolithic institutions in America. There may be more ideological diversity in the Taliban. Here are a few figures:

A 2007 study by sociologists Neil Gross of Harvard and Solon Simmons of George Mason University found that liberal faculty outnumber conservatives by 11-1 among social scientists and 13-1 among humanities professors. That's consistent with a long line of surveys, which tend to find self-identified liberals around 80-90% and conservatives around 10%.

It has been that way for decades. I have a folder jammed with studies. One of my favorites is an early 1990s poll that found 88% of “public affairs” faculty identifying themselves as liberal, 12% claiming to be “middle of the road,” and, remarkably, 0% opting for the conservative label.

A 2003 survey by the Center for the Study of Popular Culture found these ratios of Democrats to Republicans: Swarthmore: 21-1. Bowdoin College: 23-1. Wellesley College: 23-1. Brown University: 30-1. Amazingly, the study couldn't identify a single Republican at the faculties of Williams, Oberlin, MIT, and Haverford, nor a single Republican administrator at Penn, Carnegie Mellon, or Cornell.

Analyses of Cornell found 166 liberals compared to six conservatives; at UCLA, 141 liberals vs. nine conservatives.

I could go on and on. Remember that academia champions “diversity.”

Keep in mind, too, that these figures are fully out-of-sync with the public and parents who hand their children to these professors. For at least two decades now, the number of self-identified conservatives among the overall population has ranged near 40%, whereas self-identified liberals hover around 20%, holding steady even in the last election that elected Barack Obama.

Thus, the liberal Democrats running the federal government have no complaint about our universities. They share the same worldview, and the professors pass the faith to the students.

Indeed, consider the results of the November 2008 election, in which college-aged voters came out in droves — nearly



one in five voters, or about 25 million ballots — and went for Obama by more than two to one. As I have noted before, those voters alone well exceeded Obama's overall vote advantage. It was truly the college crowd that elected Obama.

So, this is perfect for Obama and his fellow Democrats. Why change a thing?

But actually, it's even worse than that. These professors funnel not only students to the Democratic Party. In 2004, the non-partisan Center for Responsive Politics found that the top two institutions in the country, in terms of employee per-capita contributions to presidential candidates, were Harvard and the University of California system — both of which gave 19 times more money to John Kerry than to George W. Bush.

Another 2004 analysis, by Andrew Sullivan, found that of the nearly 800 donations made to the Kerry and Bush campaigns by Ivy League professors, 92% went to Kerry. I haven't seen an analysis of 2008, but I'm sure it's worse.

Maybe I'm being unfair. Perhaps these learned institutions don't get enough money from the life-savings and bank borrowing of students and parents, and really do need a lifeline from Uncle Sam, plus a second lifeline from their states?

Nonsense. I teach at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania, which takes no government money, the result of standing for its principles of faith and freedom before the U.S. Supreme Court. The college is not wasteful; our students graduate in four years with extraordinary placement in jobs and grad schools; our students get aid through a privatized loan program; the college is listed as one of the “best buys” in higher education; it is certainly no bastion of secular liberalism; and its students score exceptionally well in surveys and tests. (Grove City College scored second in the nation in the aforementioned ISI survey.)

Sadly, though, Grove City College is the exception. The rule is what our rulers in Washington desire.

So, don't expect any AIG-like show trials of college presidents, nor President Obama firing the president of Columbia. Don't expect higher taxes on cushy contracts. Don't expect a push to cap salaries or freeze tuition or regulate rising costs.

Nope, there will be no demonization of rampant “greed” in this sector of the American workplace. There are only angels running our universities — liberal angels.

Paul Kengor is author of The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism (HarperPerennial, 2007) and professor of political science at Grove City College.

Tax Credits (Continued from page 2)

to attend, the case that vouchers violate the establishment clause is very weak; but such accusations have nevertheless impeded the growth of voucher programs.

According to Welner, tuition tax credits are “relatively unencumbered by the [political] baggage of past voucher battles.” This raises the question of whether Welner's term, “neovouchers,” is the best one for advocates of tax credits to use. That term is bound to carry with it the same “baggage” that Welner references with respect to the term “vouchers.”

Welner himself is ambivalent about the trend he chronicles in his book. He acknowledges some advantages that tuition tax credits seem to offer, but is sympathetic to school choice opponents who fear that any growth in private education will come at a cost to the quality of public education — what Welner, at the re-

cent D.C. forum, called a “cycling downward” in the quality of public schools. Sheila Simmons of the National Education Association agreed. “We have to look at the masses of children,” said Simmons. “We need to change public schools, we need to change public education.”

Simmons also argued that the private sector is too small to serve the large number of children who are not receiving a good education in public schools. Adam B. Shaeffer of the Cato Institute acknowledged that “the capacity issue is a serious one.” He said it would take time for private schools to grow, and for new schools to open. “If you actually free the money up and give parents control over that money and they start choosing private schools,” Shaeffer contended, private education will grow to meet the demand. (*Education Week*, 1-7-09)

Student Protesters Attempt to Silence Conservative Speakers

For years, conservative speakers on college campuses have frequently met with student protesters who trespass the boundaries of decency and the peaceful expression of disagreement. Students interrupt speeches and harass and heckle both the visiting speakers and the conservative students who have brought them to campus. Three especially notable recent incidents have alarmed onlookers who are concerned for the future of free speech on campus.

In April, student protesters at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill interrupted and cut short a speech by former U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo. Tancredo was to speak on the subject of in-state tuition benefits for illegal immigrants, which he opposes. Protesters inside the auditorium unrolled a banner declaring, "No one is illegal," while protesters outside chanted, "There's no debate, no space for hate." Tancredo left the stage partway through his speech after some of the protesters broke a window. (ABC News, 4-15-09)

Activist and author David Horowitz was barely able to continue a speech he gave this spring at the University of Texas at Austin. About 40 protestors, organized by professor Dana Cloud, greeted Horowitz with signs and chanting; but they allowed Horowitz to finish his speech

after a representative of the administration warned the students they could be arrested unless they quieted down. (Wall Street Journal, 4-18-09)

At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, protesters drove conservative columnist Don Feder from the lectern in March. The Republican Club, which sponsored Feder's speech, was forced to pay three times the normal fee in security costs for the event, even though the security the university provided was obviously not sufficient for Feder to finish his speech.

According to Robert L. Shibley of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), the levying of higher fees on events featuring controversial conservative speakers has become a serious problem in American universities. "The more violent and disruptive the threatened protest, the higher the security costs will be demanded of the host, giving those most willing to be violent the strongest veto over campus discourse," writes Shibley. Such administrative policies "reward hecklers rather than students who wish to engage in civil debate and dialogue." Shibley warns that if universities continue to punish students for their viewpoints or for bringing dialogue to campus, it will be impossible for American higher education to function as a "marketplace of ideas" where First Amendment rights are honored and upheld. (Boston Globe, 4-9-09)



Students protest Rep. Tom Tancredo's stance on illegal immigration

Tragic Death (Continued from page 1)

Gabriel took Vyvanse, an ADHD drug that is FDA-approved for children ages 6 through 12. But he was also prescribed Lexapro and Zyprexa, an antidepressant and antipsychotic, respectively, that are not approved for children. A few weeks before his death, Gabriel's doctor took him off of Lexapro and Zyprexa and placed him on Symbyax, a combination drug that contains the main ingredient in the antipsychotic Zyprexa together with fluoxetine, another antidepressant. Fluoxetine is the active ingredient in Prozac, and is also not approved for pediatric use. Like Lexapro, fluoxetine is in the category of antidepressants that the FDA warned in 2003 were linked to increased "suicidal thoughts or behaviors" in children, compared to children who are similarly depressed but don't take such medications.

According to Gabriel's uncle, the boy's grandfather spoke to him two weeks before his death and said he sounded like he was "doped up" and "too drugged." When Gabriel lived with relatives for a short period of time, his pediatrician discontinued his psychotropic drugs, and according to his uncle, Gabriel did well and

earned A's and B's at the private Christian school he attended.

In an interview with the *Miami Herald*, Dr. Punjwani defended the pediatric use of drugs like those Gabriel Myers received, saying that the only reason they aren't approved for children is that pharmaceutical companies are unwilling to perform clinical trials on children. He pointed out that off-label pediatric use of such drugs to treat mood instability and insomnia is routine for many doctors, and widely accepted as safe.

Dr. David L. Katz, a Yale University professor of public health, disagreed, calling pediatric use of such drugs "extremely risky." According to Katz, drugs like these might be appropriate for a child who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, but were questionable for others. "These are medications that are potent and potentially dangerous," said Katz. "They certainly are powerful drugs for anybody, let alone a seven-year-old boy." (Miami Herald, 4-21-09)



Education Policy (Continued from page 1)

the role in children's lives that is traditionally filled by involved and loving parents:

If you go back 30 or 40 years ago, the average child could get out of school at 2:30, mom was at home, child would go home to mom, dad was working, and get a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at 2:30. Today, you have more two-parent working families. You have more single moms working two, three jobs. You have unfortunately maybe children going home to no-parent families. So our society has changed. Our schools have not kept pace, and this is a chance to really create what I think the 21st-century school needs to look like. This needs to be the norm, not the exception. Time matters tremendously, and all of our families need our doors open longer hours.

Economist John Lott, author of *Freedomnomics*, challenges provisions, including lengthening school hours and expanding government preschool and other services, that benefit unionized teachers and extend the public school monopoly and bureaucracy. "Despite all the rhetoric about improving American education, Obama has ignored one fact," writes Lott: "American children do relatively well compared to children in other countries when they are young. The longer that they are in the American public schooling system, the worse they do."

The implications are more than just academic, writes Lott. "Research shows that the countries with the earliest school starting age are the most totalitarian and socialist countries. Time after time, totalitarian governments found that they can best instill the views and values that the governments wanted by taking the children away from their parents' influence

as soon as possible. Longer school days is also a means to increase the influence of the government and decrease that of the family." (FOXNews.com, 4-10-09)

The injection of billions of dollars into state education budgets through the economic stimulus and the new budget gives the president and his Department of Education a loud voice with which to demand certain education policies in states. The \$787-billion economic stimulus set \$115 billion aside for education. "Don't underestimate the value of money, especially in these hard times," said Bruce Reed of the Democratic Leadership Council. (Education Week, 4-8-09)

Reversing School Choice

Obama and the new Congress frustrated school choice proponents by signing the death warrant of the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, a successful and popular voucher reform that offered poor children a way out of the extraordinarily ineffective D.C. school system. D.C.'s Mayor Adrian Fenty joined with parents to plead for the program's continuation, to no avail. "Now public school teachers and administrators in the District of Columbia do not need to worry about trying to improve, as the competition was wiped out by the stroke of a pen," noted economist Lott.

Obama's Department of Education actually had in its possession a scientific study proving the voucher program's success, but withheld the information until after the legislation shutting the program down had passed. Curiously, Secretary Duncan's official position on the issue was that children in the voucher program should be allowed to continue. The study the Department of Education withheld showed that children who had received vouchers to attend private school since 2004 were academically one-and-a-half to two years ahead of their peers who had stayed in the school system.

State Board of Ed (Continued from page 1)

of unelected officials, and burying the entire process under layer upon layer of bureaucracy. H.B. 710 passed the House after its proponents asked for a recount, which they blamed on "machine malfunction."

State Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin) summed up the feeling of the primarily Democratic contingent making these proposals: "at this point, a lot of us are questioning . . . whether the state Board of Education serves a purpose anymore." Supporters of the board countered that the 15-person elected body represents ordinary Texas citizens who are politically involved and care about education. Board member Cynthia Dunbar said the legislature should consider the board's spirited debates on controversial issues in education as a good sign that the board represents the differing views of all Texans, on both left and right.

William Lutz of the *Lone Star Report* (4-17-09) said the state Board of Education is "the only place where average people, who can't hire lobbyists, can go and have their voices heard." Lutz called attention to the board's achievements and said that "before trying to neuter the

elected State Board of Education, lawmakers may wish to consider the board's real record and accomplishments, not just the spin from turf-conscious educator groups and the social left."

Unless the board is disbanded or converted to an appointed board, eight of the 15 seats will be up for election in 2010. (Wall Street Journal, 4-13-09)

Briefs (Continued from page 2)

Workers' poor English skills impact the economy to the tune of \$65 billion a year in lost wages, according to a new report from the Lexington Institute. There are over 11 million people in the United States who do not speak English well, including more than 5 million who are in elementary or secondary school. "Americans who lack adequate English skills trail the rest of the nation substantially, both educationally and economically," the report finds. "Conditions such as linguistic isolation have exacerbated these challenges significantly, and the number of Americans living in linguistic isolation has grown in recent years." (lexingtoninstitute.org/docs/845.pdf)