What's Next on the Pro-Family Agenda? Tax Relief Just the First Step

by Marty J. Dannenfelser

As Congress recessed for the month of August, much of the national news coverage focused on passage of the bipartisan budget and tax legislation. Senate campaign finance hearings also attracted considerable attention. These issues are noteworthy, but there are many other legislative battles looming on the horizon.

Millions of families with children will benefit from the enactment of the $500-per-child tax credit, one of FRC's major long-term priorities. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has expressed his intention to pass new tax relief bills each year and we have already conveyed ideas to congressional leaders about pro-family provisions that should be included in such packages.

We will urge Congress to bring the 1998 child credit up to $500 (the newly enacted package provides a $400 credit in 1998, with a $500 credit each year thereafter). We will seek to make the credit available for 17-year-olds, work towards indexing the credit in future years to account for inflation, and seek to protect taxpayers who might lose their eligibility for the child credit in future years if they are unfairly required to pay a federal alternative minimum tax (AMT).

Congressional leaders acknowledge that they made some unfortunate policy concessions to President Clinton during the final negotiations on the budget and tax packages. Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.) offered an amendment which would have allowed withdrawals from tax-free education savings accounts for kindergarten through 12th grade education expenses (for children in public, private, religious or home schools), but it was dropped after the president personally vowed to veto the entire package over its inclusion (see Gary Bauer's "Inside D.C." column for more details). Sen. Coverdell and Speaker Gingrich have since introduced free-standing legislation and intend to make this important education reform a major priority on the congressional agenda this fall. FRC has worked diligently on this initiative and looks forward to a cooperative effort with congressional leaders and pro-family activists to advance this groundbreaking legislation.

Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.)

Many governors and mayors share FRC's dismay about the rollback in "workfare" policy that was contained in the budget package. Again reacting to a presidential veto threat, Congress added provisions that impose numerous mandates on state and local governments which are trying to move people from welfare to work. Congressional leaders will seek to restore the vital welfare reform that was enacted barely a year ago, but the president's veto pen threatens to thwart them once again.

The issue of worldwide religious persecution will receive the attention of Congress before they conclude the 1997 legislative calendar. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), a champion of religious freedom internationally, has played a leading role in organizing a broad coalition which is committed to ending the unconscionable persecution of millions of religious believers who are beaten, jailed or martyred for merely expressing their faith.

FRC will pursue a variety of initiatives pertaining to the sanctity of life. We will continue to work for passage of legislation to ban partial-birth abortions, even as we lay the groundwork for future initiatives to protect innocent human life. The right of parents to guide their children in areas relating to sexuality deserves much greater recognition, particularly where taxpayers' funds are involved.

Drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases deserve greater attention from our nation's leaders. Recent reports which indicate a slight reduction in teenage marijuana use have been offset by troubling indications of increased teen usage of cocaine and heroin. Drug needle giveaways and related surrender tactics send the wrong message to our nation's young people. Taxpayer-funded grants to programs which promote the homosexual agenda can also have harmful consequences for our children.

Long-term tax simplification, reforms in entitlement spending and the elimination of unjustifiable taxpayer-financed entities like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) will likewise receive considerable attention from our legislative, press and policy teams. WW

Washington Watch *is published by Family Research Council. For more information, contact Family Research Council, 801 G Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Phone: 202-393-2100. Fax: 202-393-2134. Legislative information line (toll call): 202-783-HOME. Toll-free publication order line: 1-800-225-4008. Internet address:* ***http://www.frc.org.*** *E-mail address:* ***corrdept@frc.org.***

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ON THE HILL

Population Imperialism. Rep. Chris Smith's (R-N.J.) amendment to the Foreign Operations appropriations bill (H.R. 2159) would end the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) $25 million funding until it stops collaborating with China's coercive population program. It would also keep U.S. taxpayer dollars out of the hands of abortion providers by reinstating the "Mexico City Policy." Reps. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) and Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) have offered a substitute amendment purporting to stop funding for groups which do abortions for "family planning." Planned Parenthood says their abortions are done for "reproductive health," not "family planning," so the Gilman/Pelosi legislation will not stop abortion providers from receiving U.S. funds. Rep. Ron Paul's (R-Texas) pro-family amendment would zero out the entire $385 million population control program, which has abused and harmed people worldwide, trampled on the religious and cultural values of other nations, and hurt America's diplomatic relations with many foreign countries. Votes are expected to take place this month. — *SAM*

Child Protection Amendment. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) and Don Manzullo (R-Ill.) have offered an amendment to the Labor/Health and Human Services/Education appropriations bill (H.R. 2264) which would require federally funded Title X "family planning" clinics to notify parents before giving contraceptives to minors. In Illinois, a teacher who sexually molested his 13-year-old student took her to a taxpayer-funded Title X clinic for Depo-Provera injections. Taxpayers funded three shots of this drug, though the teen's parents were never contacted. Rep. John Porter (R-Ill.) offered a substitute which would effectively gut the legislation, merely "encouraging" teens to involve their parents, but not requiring any parental notification. The votes are expected sometime this month. — *SAM*

National Testing Debate. In his 1997 State of the Union address, President Clinton called for national tests in reading and math. Without congressional approval or formal policy recommendation, the U.S. Department of Education recently moved to award contracts to companies for the development of those tests. The department is strictly prohibited from involvement in curriculum issues, so Rep. Bill Goodling (R-Pa.) will offer an amendment to the Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill (H.R. 2264) to prohibit the Department of Education from using federal funds for this purpose. — *ELB*

Watch with a New Look

(Continued from cover)

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— Karl Day, Senior Editor

Around TOWN

Saved from D.C. Schools. Washington, D.C. parents, already frustrated by violence and poor test scores in District public schools, are now told schools will open late this fall because dilapidated buildings need repair. Amid this crisis, the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) offers solutions for low-income D.C. children, providing private school scholarships for half-tuition up to $1,500 to more than 525 needy students. The average income of recipient families is $15,000, but they manage to save for their portion of the tuition. Sacrifice is the cause of student success in the program, say WSF directors. For more information, contact The Washington Scholarship Fund, 1133 15th St., N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 842-1355. — *JAM*

Jailer Jiang. Shortly after his 1994 Beijing meeting to discuss human rights with John Shattuck, a U.S. State Department official, democracy advocate Wei Jingsheng was again thrown into prison by China's communist rulers. Now, President Jiang Zemin has been invited to visit the U.S. FRC President Gary Bauer's Aug. 7 letter to the Clinton administration pressed for the democracy champion's release. This demand for the release of Wei Jingsheng as a precondition for Jiang's visit would test President Bill Clinton's policy of "constructive engagement" with China. — *RGM*

Stand in the Gap. Promise Keepers, the largest men's ministry in America, expects more than one million men to attend its Saturday, Oct. 4 event, "Stand in the Gap: A Solemn Assembly" on the Mall in Washington, D.C. The ministry was founded to encourage men of all ages and races to become godly influences in their world and to keep their commitments to their families, communities and, most of all, God. The gathering will be an occasion for men to renew those commitments and ask God to heal our land. For more information, contact Promise Keepers at 1-888-265-3297. — *ELB*