



Ethical Action Report



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Labor Rights:

Demand a Living Wage for Gulf Coast Laborers

Join Faithful America, labor rights advocates, Humanists, and many others in urging President Bush to reverse his decision allowing federal contractors to hire laborers in the Gulf Coast at poverty wages.

BACKGROUND

One of President Bush's initial responses to Hurricane Katrina was to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act on September 8, 2005. The act ensures that laborers on federal contracts are paid at the prevailing wage, which in New Orleans for instance, ranges from \$9.00 to \$15.00 per hour. The prevailing wage for a construction worker was \$9.00 per hour and \$14.30 per hour for an electrician in New Orleans. This suspension extends beyond Louisiana to Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. The Davis-Bacon Act has been protecting the rights of laborers since 1931 as it was passed during the Great Depression.

Thirty-five Republican representatives urged President Bush to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act, mentioning that the act has been suspended three times by Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, and the elder George Bush during times of emergencies. However, the suspensions have been for very short periods. Roosevelt suspended it in 1934 due to contradictions between the act and another regulation for two weeks. Nixon suspended it in 1971 to try to control rising inflation for six weeks. The

elder Bush suspended it in 1992 after Hurricane Andrew, before President Clinton took office and swiftly reinstated it.

Condemning Americans, many of whom are already trapped in poverty, to a lower standard of living is completely unacceptable.

ACTION

Urge President Bush to immediately reinstate the Davis-Bacon Act and encourage Congress to demand that the President honor these critical labor standards.

Education Front:

Protect Public Education in the Gulf Coast

Urge your Congress members to support and strengthen public education in Hurricane Katrina affected states.

BACKGROUND

The Bush administration is trying to push through \$488 million in vouchers to send children displaced by Hurricane Katrina to private and religious schools.

Public schools are the public safety net for the majority of the displaced students in the Gulf Coast; they are providing not just education but essential social services as well.

Many private schools aren't equipped to care for these students. Numerous private schools in the Gulf Coast don't have the ability to enroll new students—public schools are enrolling private school students.

This is an inappropriate time to start a divisive debate on school vouchers. The priority should be funding, supporting, and providing lasting ways to help these children.

ACTION

Tell your senators and representatives to oppose school vouchers in Hurricane Katrina relief legislation. We can't allow the needs of children displaced by Hurricane Katrina to be compromised for a controversial, partisan agenda.

Reproductive Rights:

Encourage Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Support the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act

Urge your Congress members to co-sponsor the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act (S.368 and H.R. 2553).

BACKGROUND

The REAL Act would “provide assistance to reduce teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases and to support healthy adolescent development,” by giving over \$200 million a year in state grants to conduct comprehensive sexuality education programs. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced the REAL Act (formerly the Family Life Education Act).

There is currently no federal funding stream for comprehensive sexuality education programs. Yet there are three federal funding streams totaling nearly \$170 million (in fiscal year 2005) for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Currently states are only eligible for federal funding of sexuality education programs if they agree to teach abstinence-only-until-marriage. These federally funded programs are prohibited from mentioning contraceptives, with one exception—only in terms of failure rates.

The REAL Act would reform this medically inaccurate and sectarian eligibility requirement by allowing states to receive federal funds for educational programs that involve abstinence and accurate contraceptive information.

The REAL Act would specifically require comprehensive sexuality education curricula that is (as stated in the legislation):

- 1) age-appropriate and medically accurate;
- 2) doesn't teach or promote religion;
- 3) teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases;
- 4) stresses the value of abstinence while not ignoring those young people who have had or are having sexual intercourse;
- 5) provides information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods as a means to prevent pregnancy;
- 6) provides information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods as a means to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
- 7) encourages family communication about sexuality between parent and child;
- 8) teaches young people the skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality, including how to avoid unwanted verbal, physical, and sexual advances and how not to make unwanted verbal, physical, and sexual advances; and
- 9) teaches young people how alcohol and drug use can affect responsible decision-making.

A general public/parent survey released in January 2004, conducted jointly by Harvard University's Kennedy School, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and National Public Radio showed that ninety-three percent support comprehensive sexuality education curricula in high schools.

ACTION

Contact your senators and representatives and urge them to co-sponsor the REAL Act (S.368 and H.R. 2553). America's youth deserve comprehensive sexuality education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and not religiously motivated.

The REAL Act (S.368) currently has five co-sponsors. To view the list of co-sponsors visit:
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:SN00368:@@P>

The REAL Act (H.R. 2553) currently has 95 co-sponsors. To view the list of co-sponsors visit:
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:HR02553:@@P>

Church/State Front: Oppose Federally Funded Religious Discrimination in Head Start

Tell your senators you oppose any attempt in the Head Start Improvements for School Readiness Act (S.1107) to permit federally funded religious discrimination.

BACKGROUND

As reported in the September *Ethical Action Report*, the School Readiness Act (H.R. 2123) was a bipartisan bill with provisions to protect, expand, and improve the Head Start program that benefits

children across the nation, but was threatened by an attempt by Representative John Boehner (R-OH) to roll back existing civil rights protections.

Representative Boehner introduced an amendment allowing for federally funded religious discrimination in employment to the Head Start reauthorization bill on Thursday, September 22nd, which narrowly passed in the House of Representatives.

Thank you to all who took action, we need your support again! Head Start reauthorization is headed to the Senate soon.

There is no compelling reason to undo the civil rights protections in the Head Start program that President Nixon signed into law in 1972. Not only would such a removal of employment discrimination safeguards have the potential of disenfranchising dedicated teachers and parent volunteers, but it would also fail to address an existing problem. Faith-based organizations have been partnering with the government to provide social services for many years without the need to bypass civil rights laws.

Boehner's amendment specifically allows taxpayer funded faith-based organizations to hire and fire teachers on the basis of religious beliefs. It could even be used to prevent people with different beliefs from volunteering and prevent underprivileged children from receiving a valuable education at an important age.

If a similar provision makes it into the Senate version of Head Start reauthorization, it would legally sanction discrimination by jeopardizing the rights of nonreligious and religious Americans alike.

ACTION

We ask you to contact your senators and urge them to maintain the bipartisan direction of the Head Start reauthorization bill and oppose any attempts that would roll back critical civil rights protections.

Contacting Elected Officials

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