

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 489#

USA: REPUBLICAN ASSAULTS ON SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

The USA has to date been stronger than Australia in holding the line against entanglement of religion with the State, particularly in the funding of religious schools. The rise of a militant religious right which leaves middle-of-the-road and independent voters unrepresented has mounted an assault on the basic principle of freedom of and from religion.

The Republican Party in the USA is currently dominated by the religious right. Their Party platforms at both the federal and State levels place the principle of separation Church the State - enshrined in the First Amendment of their Constitution - under threat. Not unsurprisingly, this also places public education under pressure.

Although both Republicans and Democrats endorsed faith-based initiatives, Republicans went further than the Democrats with the following educational policies:

- The School voucher program should be expanded as a model for the rest of the country.
- 'Faith-based organisations' should be allowed to retain religious preferences in hiring.
- At the State level six of the 32 Republican parties endorse the teaching of creationism as science in public school classrooms.
- The Texas Republican Party called separation of church and state a 'myth.'
- Arkansas, Iowa and South Carolina Republicans say that religious institutions should not be taxed, though few, if any are.
- Almost nothing positive is said about public schools. IOWA's platform routinely refers to 'government schools,' from which 'Judeo-Christian values and scripture should not be excluded.'

Meanwhile, on November 6, 2012 Florida voters will confront two assaults on religious freedom. There is an Amendment 8 which will remove the state's century-old ban on public funds for sectarian schools and replace it with the bland and deceptive phrase, 'No individual or entity may be discriminated against or barred from receiving funding on the basis of religious identity or belief.'

Florida Education Association (FEA) president Andy Ford said: '*This is designed to open up the state treasury to voucher schools, but that's not what the title of the amendment and the ballot summary say.*'

Supporters of public education in Australia should look carefully at the 'Gonski' legislation proposed by the Gillard government. Will it too, be a mere white-wash for opening up our public education systems to the 'voucher system'. What else is the student based funding – to be topped up for the disadvantaged – but a voucher system dressed up for a sugar coating of 'neediness'? (For further information on the American situation see Americans for Religious Liberty at www.arlinc.org and their Journal, *Voice of Reason*; and www.goddiscussion.com/98330/gop-religious_platforms.)

THE DOGS RADIO PROGRAM

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