

Partisan Politics in Congress and the Teachers' Lounge, and Merry Christmas from the President

As we approach Christmas, and a well-deserved break for students and teachers, Congress still has a lot of work to get done before they can kick-back and put their feet up. As of press time it appears that after a lot of compromise among Republicans they have a conference committee report on tax reform that they can agree on. The report should pass both the Senate and House with no Democrat votes and arrive on the President's desk for signature by Christmas. Besides the increase in take home pay that most Americans will see the report has [some good news for teachers](#). The \$250 deduction for purchasing classroom materials, which the House recommended eliminating, is still there. Also, the elimination of the ability to deduct state and local taxes, which could affect the budget of schools in high tax states, has been scaled back by allowing up to \$10,000 in state and local taxes that may be deducted. Finally, supporters of private school choice received a small boost. 529 savings plans that many have used to save money for their children's college costs may now also be used for to pay private school tuition. Interest in these savings plans is not taxed by the federal government.

Congress also needs to develop an omnibus spending bill authorizing federal debt levels for the upcoming year because they once again will be spending more than they will be bringing in. Heightened political polarization in the Congress has of course made this a very difficult issue to grapple with

Increased partisanship also influences your relationships in the schools. [Educator Political Perceptions](#), a national survey of public school teachers released in December by Education Week, sheds some light on how the partisan divide of our nation plays out in the schools.

The poll found that two thirds of school employees said they avoided political activities because they felt it might cause problems with their jobs in education. 21% said they did this "a lot," 27% did this "some," and 17% said, "only a little." However, it was encouraging to see that this did not completely stifle political activity. 66% reported that since the 2016 election they had spoken with an elected official, 54% had attempted to change a colleague's mind on a political issue, and 23% reported that they had given money to a political cause. We should hope and pray that Christians in the schools feel as open to share their religious beliefs with colleagues in the schools and in the community.

Surprisingly, unlike the liberal rhetoric of union leaders, the findings show that educators view themselves as largely moderates (43%) and those who do not wish to be viewed that way were nearly evenly split between liberal and conservative with 24% thinking of themselves as liberal and 23% thinking of themselves as conservative. Only a very small group viewed themselves as very liberal (5%) or very conservative (4%).

The rest of the poll shows more skewed divergence of thought. Some of the interesting findings are:

30% of the school employees polled self-identify as Republican.	41% of the school employees polled self-identify as Democrat.
29% say they voted for Donald Trump.	50% say they voted for Hillary Clinton.
9% gave the Republican Party a grade of A or B on education issues.	23% gave the Democrat Party a grade of A or B on education issues.
33% think the local teacher's union represented their political views only a little (19%) or not at all (14%).	68% think the local teacher's union represented their political views some (40%) or a lot (28%).
16% support school choice.	74% oppose school choice.
15% support government funding of school vouchers for tuition at private schools.	79% oppose government funding of school vouchers for tuition at private schools.
33% support tuition tax credits.	52% oppose tuition tax credits.
45% believe transgender students should be required to use the school restroom and locker rooms of the gender they were born into.	55% believe transgender students should be allowed to use the school restroom and locker rooms of the gender with which they currently identify.
52% agree that students of color have the same educational opportunities as whites in our country.	43% disagree that students of color have the same educational opportunities as whites in our country.
20% oppose the idea that different states should use the same standards to hold public schools accountable in reading and math.	72% support the idea that different states should use the same standards to hold public schools accountable in reading and math.

It will not surprise to you to know that the survey also revealed that the positions in the right column of the table were more often supported by the Clinton voters polled, while those on the left were more frequently supported by the Trump voters. The results indicate that educators, despite viewing themselves as moderates, tend to fall out slightly to the liberal side on most political issues. One factor that has no doubt reinforced the liberal leanings of educators is the influence of teacher unions. In many districts the local teachers' union receives payments from all employees, even non-members, and uses some of this funding to support their positions on issues – hiring staff and printing literature to promote the union position. This is in spite of the fact that the poll shows that a solid 1/3 of teachers feel that the local union does not represent their political views.

While Christians should never be surprised to find ourselves in a minority position on many political and social issues, we should be concerned when we are compelled to financially support any organization that does not represent our views. This is a frequent complaint of many teachers that may be remedied in the new year when the Supreme Court hears and decides on the [Janus v AFSCME](#) Supreme Court case on union fees.

If the partisan polarization of our nation is starting to wear you down, [President Trump's Christmas message](#) could give some hope. In addition to clearly proclaiming a non-partisan message, “that we are called to serve one another, to love one another, and to pursue peace in our hearts and all throughout the world,” and, “that the birth of Jesus Christ and the story of this incredible life forever changed the course of human history,” he offered a prayer, “that our country will be a place where every child knows a home filled with love, a community rich with hope, and a nation blessed with faith.”

If you feel that the President needs your prayers, here is a [prayer for truth](#), based on Proverbs 29:12, "If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked."

CEAI is interested in your thoughts. Members are encouraged to enter comments below. Personal comments may be addressed to the author at JMitchell@ceai.org. John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.