

# Biographical Sketches of Speakers

**U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann** was elected in 2006 to represent Minnesota's 6th District in Congress. In her first term, Rep. Bachmann developed a reputation as a "principled reformer" who stays true to her conservative beliefs, while pushing for real reform of the broken ways of Washington. And, her strong advocacy for her constituents earned her a second term in Congress in November 2008.

Prior to serving in the U.S. Congress, she was elected to the Minnesota State Senate in 2000, where she championed the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights. Prior to that, Bachmann spent five years as a federal tax litigation attorney, working on hundreds of civil and criminal cases. That experience solidified Bachmann's strong support for efforts to simplify the Tax Code and reduce tax burdens on family and small business budgets.

Rep. Bachmann currently sits on the Financial Services Committee. This committee is tasked with the oversight of numerous financial sectors including housing, real estate and banking. This also gives the Congresswoman keen insight into the housing crisis and credit crunch, leading her to be a staunch opponent of the taxpayer-funded bailout of Wall Street.

Rep. Bachmann and her husband own a small business mental health care practice that employs 42 people.

**Senator Scott Beason** is serving his first term in the Alabama Senate. He was elected to two consecutive terms in the Alabama House of Representatives. Senator Beason received a Degree in Geology from the University of Alabama. He is a successful businessman and owner of Custom Renovators and Old South Construction.

The Senator and his wife, Lori, and their three children, Keller, Merritt and McCalan are members of Gardendale's First Baptist Church. He is a member of the Jefferson County Republican Executive Committee and the Alabama Republican Executive Committee in addition to the Senate Committees on which he serves.

**Alison Consoletti** is the director of research at The Center for Education Reform (CER), a Washington, D.C. based organization that drives the creation of better educational opportunities for all children by boldly advocating for school choice, advancing the charter school movement, and challenging the education establishment.

Alison ensures that education reform advocates, parents and policy makers have the most current data and research available on education practice and policies that improve student achievement. She is the chief analyst and writer of original CER publications including the *Charter School Laws Across the States: Ranking and Scorecard*, and the *Annual Survey on America's Charter Schools*. Alison also serves as a peer reviewer for the federal Charter Schools Program Grant and was a member of the National Charter School Achievement Award Advisory Panel.

Alison began her career in the nonprofit sector at the National Hispana Leadership Institute. She has a Master in Public Administration, with an emphasis on nonprofit management from George Mason University, and a bachelor's in international affairs from The George Washington University.

**Colonel Bob Cosby** is the son of a World War II Marine, who met his bride-to-be in Washington, DC where she was supporting the war effort by working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Dr. Cosby is a Family Practice and Emergency Medicine physician who joined the U.S. Army's 20th Special Forces Group, went to Airborne and Air Assault schools, and completed 39 parachute jumps before being selected as a Special Forces physician for the first Gulf War. He has completed 15 overseas military missions, including five in the Iraqi Combat Zone. He has also served on seven church-related medical missions overseas. Dr. Cosby directs The JESUS Video Project of Alabama and the annual Meadow Brook Runs. He is a member of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, and enjoys running and writing.

**Representative Paul DeMarco** has served in the Alabama House of Representatives since his election in a special election that took place on April 26,

**Phyllis Schlafly, J.D.** has been a national leader of the conservative movement since the publication of her best-selling 1964 book, *A Choice Not An Echo*. She has been a leader of the pro-family movement since 1972, when she started her national volunteer organization, now called Eagle Forum. In a ten-year battle, Mrs. Schlafly led the pro-family movement to victory over the principal legislative goal of the radical feminists, called the Equal Rights Amendment. She debates on college campuses more frequently than any other conservative. She was named one of the "100 most important women of the 20th century" by the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Mrs. Schlafly's monthly newsletter called *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* is now in its 43rd year. Her syndicated column appears in 100 newspapers, her radio commentaries are heard daily on 500 stations, and her radio talk show on education called "Eagle Forum Live" is heard weekly on 75 stations. Both can be heard on the internet.

Mrs. Schlafly is the author or editor of 20 books on subjects as varied as family and feminism (*The Power of the Positive Woman* and *Feminist Fantasies*), nuclear strategy (*Strike From Space* and *Kissinger on the Couch*), education (*Child Abuse in the Classroom*), child care (*Who Will Rock the Cradle?*), and phonics (*First Reader* and *Turbo Reader*). Her most recent book, *The Supremacists: The Tyranny of Judges and How to Stop It*, is both a warning that self-government is in peril and a plan of action.

Mrs. Schlafly is a lawyer and was appointed by President Reagan to the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, 1985-1991. She has testified before more than 50 Congressional and State Legislative committees on constitutional, national defense, and family issues. Mrs. Schlafly is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Washington University, received her J.D. from Washington University Law School, and received her Master's in Political Science from Harvard University. In 2008, Washington University/St. Louis awarded Phyllis an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

Phyllis Schlafly is America's best-known advocate of the dignity and honor that we as a society owe to the role of fulltime homemaker. The mother of six children, she was the 1992 Illinois Mother of the Year.

In 2009, she was awarded the prestigious Focus on the Family James C. Dobson Vision and Leadership Award and the first-ever Clare Boothe Luce Lifetime Achievement Award.

**Larry E. Schweikart, Ph.D.** is an American historian. He is a professor of History at the University of Dayton and the author of more than a dozen books.

Larry Schweikart went to Arizona State University, got terrible grades, and upon graduation, promptly went on the road as a drummer in a rock band. His group became semi-famous, opening for "Steppenwolf," the "James Gang," and "Mother's Finest," and drew the attention of Billboard Magazine. After a few years, however, Schweikart tired of the road and wanted a more intellectual pursuit.

After a single U.S. History course during summers school, he decided he wanted to be a professor. Schweikart went on to earn an M.A. in History from Arizona State, and a Ph.D. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. By the time he had graduated, Schweikart had already written two books and several academic articles as a graduate student. After a year in the University of Wisconsin system, he took a position at the University of Dayton, where he teaches to the present.

Over the years, Schweikart has written nearly 30 books, dozens of articles and book reviews, and has become an authority in antebellum banking and finance. In the 1990s, he wrote his own history of American business, *The Entrepreneurial Adventure*, then, with Michael Allen, began work on a larger project, a History of the United States. Published in 2004, *A Patriot's History of the United States* became a best-seller and attracted the attention of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, who interviewed Schweikart in March 2004. Now in a fourth printing, *Patriot's History* continues to be the alternative history for parents disgusted with the dominant liberal-left textbooks.

In 2006, Schweikart followed up with the controversial *America's Victories: Why the U.S. Wins Wars and Will Win the War on Terror*. Schweikart was invited by the President of the United States to the Oval Office for an extended discussion of military history in August 2006.

## Matthew Spalding

### NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

November 2, 2009 4:00 A.M.

#### **The Rediscovery of America**

Here's the best ground from which to repulse the whole progressive project.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *In his new book, We Still Hold These Truths: Rediscovering Our Principles, Reclaiming Our Future (ISI Books), Matthew Spalding defines America's foundational principles, shows how they have come under assault by modern progressive-liberalism and lays out a strategy to recover them in American society. In this adapted excerpt, Spalding argues that the choice is between continued decline into a European-style, centralized state or rededication to the principles of liberty.*

By any measure, the United States of America is a great nation. Thirteen colonies are now 50 states covering a vast continent and beyond. The U.S. economy accounts for almost a quarter of the total gross domestic product of all the countries in the world.

The strongest military force on Earth allows the United States to extend its power anywhere. The American people remain among the most hardworking, churchgoing, affluent, and generous. Just as George Washington predicted, the United States is a sovereign nation "in command of its own fortunes."

And yet it seems we are on a course of self-destruction.

Every nation derives meaning and purpose from some unifying quality — an ethnic character, a common religion, a shared history. America is different. Unique among the nations, America was founded at a particular time, by a particular people, on the basis of a particular idea.

At its birth, this nation justified its independence by asserting truths said to be self-evident, according to "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God." Working from the great principle of human equality, the revolutionaries who launched this experiment in popular government claimed a new basis of political legitimacy: the consent of those governed. Through a carefully written constitution, they created an enduring framework of limited government based on the rule of law.

With this structure, they sought to establish true religious liberty, provide for economic opportunity, secure national independence, and maintain a flourishing society of republican self-government — all in the name of a simple but radical idea of human liberty.

The founding of the United States was indeed revolutionary, but not in the sense of replacing one set of rulers with another or overthrowing the institutions of society. Our American Revolution was about the ideas upon which a new nation was to be established. Permanent truths "applicable to all men and all times," as Abraham Lincoln later said, proclaimed that principle — rather than will — would be the ultimate ground of government.

What is truly revolutionary about America is that for the first time in human history these universal ideas became the foundation of a particular system of government and its political

Reclaiming our future requires a concerted effort to push back the progressive assault on liberty and recover the founding principles in our political culture. We should focus attention on six areas:

**Educate for Liberty.** In the classroom, high schools largely ignore, minimize, or disparage the story of America's founding. Students can graduate from top colleges and universities without taking a single course in U.S. history. Dominated by relativism and historicism, too many of our schools, colleges and universities justify neglect of the founding by arguing it is too outdated and difficult to explain. Or they fixate on acknowledged flaws and alleged errors of the founding in view of modern values. By doing so, they subvert the principles of liberty and constitutional government. We must reverse course and commit ourselves at every level of education to promote awareness and appreciation of founding principles.

**Engage the American Mind.** We need to make a clear and forthright defense of core principles. We must apply the principles creatively to questions of the day, supporting positions consistent with them and reframing the national debate about the most serious issues. Despite constant criticism and scorn by academic elites, politicians and the popular media, most Americans still believe in the uniqueness of this country and respect the noble ideas put forth by the Founders. We must give voice to those who haven't given up on the American experiment in self-government, concluded the cause is lost and accepted decline as inevitable.

**Uphold the Constitution.** We need political leaders who understand and uphold America's principles. Public officials take a solemn oath to support the Constitution, which means they have a moral obligation to abide by the founding document in carrying out the duties of office. For members of Congress, this means determining constitutional authority for bills they pass. For the president, it means considering the constitutionality of legislation, withholding approval of bills deemed unconstitutional, and executing the law in a constitutional manner. Judges are in a unique position to spell out the meaning and consequences of the Constitution. However, it is imperative to understand — and for judges to recognize — they are not above, outside, or immune from the constraints of that document.

**Defend Free Markets and Fiscal Responsibility.** The fruits of hard work and entrepreneurship for the sake of improving the condition of self and family are moral goods that contribute to human happiness. So are the opportunities long associated with pursuit of the American Dream. All have the added virtue of harnessing enlightened self-interest to serve the common good and limited, constitutional government. At a time when the American system of democratic capitalism is under concerted attack, we must reconnect economic arguments for liberty and prosperity with the moral case for equal opportunity, free enterprise, and human creativity.

**Revive Self-Government.** In assuming more and more tasks in more and more areas outside its responsibilities, modern government greatly damaged American self-rule. By promoting an entitlement mentality and dependency rather than self-reliance and independence, administrative government encourages a character that is incompatible with republicanism. The state's extended reach — fueled by its imperative to impose moral neutrality on the public square — continues to push traditional social institutions into the shadows. We must reverse this trend and restore the standing and influence of social institutions meant to strengthen the fabric of culture and civil society.

**Promote Liberty in the World.** By the very nature of the principles upon which the Founders established it, the United States — more than any other nation in history — has a special responsibility to defend not only the cause of liberty but the meaning of liberty at home and

## 2010 Legislative Session

**HB 99 Rolling Reserve Budget Act (Canfield):** This legislation will change the way we budget in Alabama. The legislature currently bases its budget on projections for next year's revenue from the Legislative Fiscal Office. The erratic changes in ETF revenues from any given year to the next have resulted in projections and budgets that are prorated 30% of the time the legislature enacts a budget in Alabama. To address this problem Rep. Greg Canfield has proposed budgets be based on a 15 year rolling average. In years where the actual revenues exceed the rolling average the bill applies 80% of excess funds above what is necessary to maintain 30% of the ETF budget in the Budget Stabilization Fund to the unfunded liabilities in the TRS and PEEHIP retirement plans. The remaining 20% of those excess revenues flow into a capital fund for public education, increasing the funds available for construction and renovation of public schools.

**HB 47 Alabama Health Care Freedom Act (Beason/Gipson):** This bill would propose an amendment to the Alabama Constitution to preserve the freedom of Alabama residents to make decisions about and provide for their own healthcare.

**Sovereignty Resolution (Canfield/Beason):** This resolution declares Alabama's sovereignty under the 10th amendment. The resolution would be sent to Congress and the President, and it is a good message to send.

**SB 202 Alabama Innovative Charter Schools Act (French):** This bill would provide for the creation of charter schools authorized by registered local school boards and the State Board of Education under certain conditions.

**Gambling Ban (Beason):** This bill is a constitutional amendment banning all forms of gambling, even paper bingo. The people of Alabama will only have the option to vote to make bingo *illegal*. If the vote fails we keep the status quo.

**HB 278 Ethics Reform Bill (DeMarco):** Rep. Paul DeMarco is introducing legislation to close some of the loopholes in our ethics laws—including mandatory ethics training for legislators and electronic filing requirements.

**HB 55 Ethics Commission Subpoena Power (Ward):** This legislation will grant subpoena power to the Alabama State Ethics Commission. Currently, all other state boards possess this power including the Alabama Cosmetology Board and the Alabama Board of Licensed Massage Therapists.

**Medicare Fraud (DeMarco):** This bill will require online disclosures to be posted from the Medicaid office so that Alabamians will have access to where their money



## The Real Costs of the Legislature Killing the Charter School Bill

Once again the Democrat majority that controls the Alabama State Legislature did what they so often do -- fail the parents and children of Alabama. The latest abuse of their legislative majority is the killing of a bill that would allow charter schools in Alabama.

Charter schools are independent *public schools* allowed to operate with much the same flexibility as *private schools*. Charter schools can set objectives and hire the teachers and staff necessary to achieve those objectives. They do not have the restrictions placed on public schools when it comes to firing incompetent staff or teachers. In addition, if charter schools fail to educate adequately, they can be closed.

Although they are under state law and are usually authorized by a state or local government agency or college, they have much greater independence in establishing budgets and academic programs. Charter schools can be a tremendous benefit to communities with failing schools where the majority of students come from highly disadvantaged backgrounds. And that is what makes the killing of the charter school bill so disappointing.

According to a report from Johns Hopkins University, from 2005 to 2007 there were at least 86 Alabama high schools with graduation rates of 60 percent or less; 28 high schools had graduation rates of 50 percent or less; and 10 had graduation rates below 40 percent, including two high schools that had graduation rates of 31.5 percent and 32.7 percent. Children who are forced to attend these schools have no other options. It is in these areas where charter schools have the greatest potential to improve outcomes.

Opponents, namely Paul Hubbert and the education employees union, claim that charter schools do not produce better outcomes than public schools. But a 2009 study of New York City charter schools by Dr. Caroline M. Hoxby of Stanford University found that charter schools can play a very significant role in closing the achievement gap between highly disadvantaged students and those from more affluent backgrounds. The students in Dr. Hoxby's study are predominantly minority and low-income, with well over half of the students coming from single-parent households.

According to the report, "on average, a student who attended a charter school for all of grades kindergarten to eight would close about 86 percent of the achievement gap in math and 66 percent of the achievement gap in English." The study also found that a student's chances of graduating from high school increased by seven percent for each year they were in the school.

While the Legislature may have killed the chance to get more than \$180 million from the

## Speech at Eagle Forum, Birmingham, Alabama

March 27, 2010

Good morning everyone and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today here at the Eagle Forum. Ever since President Obama announced the Race to the Top competition, there has been intense focus on education reform, and most notably charter schools. Many of the final 11 states without charter laws, including Alabama, tried and failed to pass a bill these past few months. And while states tried to pass these laws to become competitors in Race to the Top, charter schools should be looked at as an integral part of a state's portfolio to provide high-quality education options for all children.

In the news and from the opposition, we hear many definitions and myths about charter schools, so I wanted to start by answering the question, "What is a charter school?" A charter school is a public school that operates on three basic principles:

1. Choice - Charters give families the opportunity to select a school most suitable for their child's educational well-being.

2. Accountability - Charter schools are judged on how well they meet student achievement goals, financial and management standards that are established in their contract. If a charter can't meet these goals, it will be closed. This is a fundamental



difference between charters and conventional schools. If a charter doesn't perform, it can and should be closed.

3. Freedom - Charters must adhere to the same major laws and regulations as all public schools, including state testing and civil rights issues, but they are free from a lot of the red tape that often diverts a school's energy and resources away from the most important thing - educating children.

The Center for Education Reform annually surveys charter school leaders across the country to get a detailed look at their environment, and to learn about their successes and their struggles. I'd like to share 6 points that highlight what is truly

happening in the charter school environment today. If you're interested in more information, inside the packets I brought, you can find information on our annual survey and you can go to our website, [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com) to download a copy.

1. Currently, there are 5,043 charter schools serving one and a half million students in 39 states and D.C. What began as an experiment 18 years ago with 1 school in Minnesota has become a national movement. The number of charters has been growing at a rapid pace since then, although holding steady at 9 percent the last 2 years. Growth will remain stagnant or may decline unless states remove charter caps and moratoriums created by states laws and legislatures.

2. Charter schools have smaller student bodies than conventional public schools. Because of this, students receive more personalized attention, and develop stronger bonds with their teachers and other students. According to other studies, being in a smaller school setting may actually increase their achievement levels. Charters enroll 372 students on average, which is 22 percent less than the 478 students in conventional schools.

3. Demand for charters continues to increase at an alarming rate. This year, our survey found that 65 percent of all charter schools had some kind of a waiting list, and list size can vary from 20 students up to a few thousand. The average number of students

on a waiting list is 239, up by 40 students from last year. The Texas Public Policy Foundation estimates that there are 40,000 students on all wait lists in Texas, and Boston, Massachusetts has over 8,000 students on wait lists. We hear these stories about waiting lists all the time - the families and students that aren't chosen in the charter school lottery to attend are heartbroken, because they end up on a waiting list with thousands of other hopeful students with no chance of attending their school of choice.

4. One myth that we hear over and over again is that charter schools do not serve disadvantaged populations and actually cherry pick the best students from other public schools. Our data

shows that this is simply not the case. Survey respondents said that 52 percent of students are minority, 50 percent are at-risk, and 54 percent are low-income. Many charter schools in places such as Atlanta, Georgia, Detroit, Michigan, or Washington, DC serve student populations that are 100% at-risk, low-income, minority or a combination. Smaller school sizes, individualized attention and innovative curriculum make these schools attractive to families with at-risk students who want them to succeed.

5. Fiscal inequity is the biggest problem for charter school operators according to our survey. Because charter schools are public schools they should receive the same amount of funding as conventional schools, but that simply does not happen. Even

states with the strongest charter laws do not fund charters equitably. Nationally, charters are funded at 68 percent of their district counterparts, receiving almost \$3,500 less per student, which can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars fewer for charters. In addition to receiving less funding, charters rarely receive transportation or facilities assistance, which is a big part of a school's total operating budget. 62 percent of survey respondents rent space for their school, because they can't afford to buy or there is nothing available - and many times they have to rent space in church halls, shopping centers, or turn portable trailers into classrooms. Charters are forced to do more with less.

6. Freedom from rules gives charter schools the ability to create innovative academic programs to best serve their students. In our survey, we ask charters to choose from a long list of instructional programs, and almost 20% responded with "other" -- which shows their originality in creating curricula. College preparatory is the number one focus with one-third of all charter schools using this curriculum - this is because of the expansion of KIPP and similar programs in urban areas with the goal to increase the college attendance rate for minority students. Here are a few examples of the varied curricula one could find in a charter based on responses: Montessori, Core Knowledge, a focus on science and technology, vocational schooling, high-school and GED

completion, environmental instruction, arts, project-based learning, and Native American culture.

Now that you have a feel for the national charter environment, I'd like to share a couple stories about charters that despite all odds, have opened and are succeeding in educating diverse populations.

The first charter school to open in Atlanta, Georgia was Charles R. Drew Charter School in 2000, which became the center of revitalizing an entire community. East Lake Meadows, the neighborhood where the school is located, deteriorated in the 1970s and 80s and was called a war zone by local police because



of the high crime rate, violence, and poor educational opportunities. The founders believed the creation of a charter school in this area would do more than educate children - by creating partnerships with the Atlanta Housing Authority and local community foundations, the neighborhood began to turn around with the development of new apartments and businesses. The charter school now works with the YMCA to offer after-school programs to keep kids off the streets and children learn the importance of discipline.

Today, the school serves over 800 students in PreK through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 98 percent of the population is African-American. Besides strict discipline the academic success has been

remarkable. Drew Charter School has a longer school day and a longer school year, one of the flexibilities many charters take advantage of that conventional schools cannot because of collective bargaining agreements. Drew Charter School students have shined, as their test scores show: 92 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders met or exceeded Georgia state writing standards compared to 74 percent in Atlanta Public Schools. To highlight growth, 62 percent of 5<sup>th</sup> graders meet or exceed math standards, and by the time they are 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 93 percent meet or exceed for an increase of 31 percent in 3 years. It has been given a Distinguished School rating by the state for making AYP 5 years in a row. By creating a successful charter school program, the people of the East Lake area of Atlanta have begun to break the poverty cycle by

completing high school, lowering the unemployment rate and reducing violent crime by over 90 percent.

Greenville Technical Charter High School is located in Greenville, South Carolina and also offers a unique curriculum to the 420 high schoolers who attend. Students are able to attend classes at the local college and earn credits while they are completing high school, putting them ahead of the curve - many even earn an associate's degree with a high school diploma. Of its 93 graduates in 2008, 63 completed 15 hours or more of college credit, and 8 received associates degrees from Greenville Technical College. This charter uses the concept of "mastery learning" - meaning every student must demonstrate "mastery" of a subject by earning

an 80 percent or more and any student who does not receives extra help to do so. This practice has paid off for the students. The graduation rate is 98 percent and they have received an Excelling Rating the past 5 years on the South Carolina School Report Card. Greenville Tech was also a bronze medal winner on the America's Best High Schools list by US News and World Report in 2007.

Bemidji, a small town of 12,000 located in northern Minnesota is home to one of the best schools in the country - TrekNorth Junior Senior High School. This 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school serves 160 students and combines a challenging academic program with a wilderness program to help students become well-rounded. All students attend AP classes, or classes that are modeled after the

AP exams to make sure they are rigorous. Classes are small, giving the 23 teachers and staff the chance to know all of their students and help them receive the best education possible.

Students also go on "outdoor adventures" such as backpacking or paddling to learn how to develop personal relationships and better their communication skills. This unique program has made TrekNorth one of the top high schools in all of Minnesota and in the top 3 percent of all high schools in the country, according to US News and World Report.

There are thousands of other stories about the students, curriculum, and academic success of charter schools across the country - some are in large cities, others in rural areas or in

suburbs; some serve large minority populations, while others serve students with special needs; some focus on college preparation, while others specialize in science, music or Core Knowledge. But all charter schools have one thing in common - they give parents in their state the choice of where to send their children to receive the best education possible.

Alabama is one of the last eleven states in the country that does not give this choice to parents. In 2004 and 2009, state legislators tried to pass charter school bills, but failed. In 2004, the proposal didn't even make it to the House floor and another was later tabled because of union and school board opposition, the same opponents that succeeded in getting the House Education

Appropriation Committee to indefinitely postpone, or kill, the charter bill this February. That is the extent that a charter bill has been entertained in the state house, despite a poor educational record in Alabama that suggests that more needs to be done.

The 2009 NAEP reading assessment results were released earlier this week, and Alabama had only 28 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 23 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders proficient or advanced. Both of these results are lower than the national average, and similar to the 2007 results - eighth graders actually scored lower this time around.

*Education Week's* 2010 Quality Counts report ranked Alabama 48<sup>th</sup> in K-12 achievement and 42<sup>nd</sup> in terms of its citizens' chance for success.

Charter schools are just one piece of a portfolio of good schools, but it is an important piece to better educate students in Alabama and improve their economic status and business development.

High-quality education systems often attract businesses and there are charter school models - like Tech High right next door in Georgia - that combine a college-ready education with developing skills for technical jobs that will become more important in the global economy.

Such an educational model could be employed in Alabama, but only with charter legislation. I got a chance to talk with John Hill of the Alabama Policy Institute in December and review the



charter school bill that was introduced. While it wasn't perfect according to what CER considers a "strong charter law" in our annual rankings of state laws, it was definitely a good start and had some positives.

First, not having any type of cap on the number of charter schools. Caps, as we have seen recently in New York, are very difficult to remove or increase after the law has passed. Starting off with no limit allows charters to grow, assuming that growth isn't constrained in other ways through funding or approval processes, which I will discuss briefly.

Second, charters in the Alabama bill would have had a lot of autonomy from state and local board regulations. It is important in a charter bill to either give a blanket waiver from all regulations or spell out all the different rules charters do not have to adhere to including curriculum, budget and personnel. Also allowing management companies to work with charter schools is a great way to foster high-quality charters because management companies have resources that start-up charter schools unfortunately, often do not.

There were 2 problems with the charter bill, as it was written, that we at CER consider to be the biggest walls when trying to create a strong charter law that creates strong charter schools. First, the

lack of multiple authorizers - or only allowing school boards to approve charters. And not only that, but the bill introduced required them to register to become authorizers instead of just giving the right to all boards. It is another layer of bureaucracy that makes approving charters more difficult because how many school boards are going to go through extra paperwork to authorize charters? Probably not many.

CER advocates for a multiple authorizer system - which means that in addition to giving all local boards the power to approve charter applications, the state department of education, and other independent entities - like a local college or university, or an independent charter board would also be given this power.

According to our data, 78 percent of the country's charter schools are located in states with multiple authorizers. These states are also home to the highest quality charters because states with multiple authorizers provide more oversight to hold charters accountable, and have the legal flexibility to address problems or close these schools if they fail to perform. Without another avenue for charters to take when submitting an application, growth will be severely stunted. Local boards are often not supportive of charters because they view them as competition and may reject applications not based on merit, but on politics. We've seen this happen many times in Maryland, Tennessee and Illinois, states that only allow local board approval.

The second most important aspect of a quality charter school law is making sure charters receive equitable funding as I discussed earlier. Charters should receive their per pupil share of state, local and federal money because they are public schools. This bill did not guarantee local funding to charters, and because of hostilities, local boards may not give charters the full amount putting them at a disadvantage. Also, there are no facility funds for charters - just a right of first refusal of school buildings. Charters struggle paying for facilities - purchasing, leasing and maintaining. We have found that many charters close because of financial problems, often times from not having money to pay for a facility or because they are unable to find one.

There were good things in the bill and things that need improvement, but I hope that you continue to push for charter school legislation in Alabama. Be forceful about trying to get the best law possible. It takes time and multiple efforts, but it's better to fight for the best law you can, then settle and try to fix it later. We get calls from states all the time that try to change a law with no success. North Carolina set a 100-charter cap when they passed their law in the mid-90's. Now, no charter can open unless one closes. There has been hardly any movement to change the cap because charter opposition is so strong and meanwhile, North Carolina children continue to suffer.

New York struggles to increase their cap almost annually. But strong fighting from teachers unions has prevented anything from happening and it may cost New York 700 million dollars in Race to the Top money.

It's also important to get parents on board as well as the policy makers because choices in education first and foremost affect families. Charter schools are one piece of the puzzle, but they are an important piece. Any kind of school choice is important as you know, charters schools, voucher programs, tax credits, magnet schools, virtual schools - because they all challenge the education establishment and give students options to find the best type of schooling for them.

The Center for Education Reform is always ready to help advocate for school choice, and when Alabama does decide to revisit charter legislation, which I hope is soon, I hope that you will all reach out to us so we can work together on writing a strong charter school law that will push Alabama public education to the next level.

Thank you for having me at your conference and I hope you all enjoy the remaining sessions. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have about charter schools and education reform. Thank you.