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TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2012

LEGISLATURE TIRRC Denounces Ketron's "Thinly Veiled Attack on Muslims" — But What About Finney's Version? [Updated]

POSTED BY STEVEN HALE ON TUE, APR 3, 2012 AT 3:23 PM

The House Education Committee today passed a **bill** sponsored by Rep. Judd Matheny that requires charter schools to disclose sources of private funding, including "all funds from foreign sources" and "gifts from foreign governments." The bill also states that a charter authority shall deny a school's application if 3.5 percent or more of the school's staff will be made up of legal immigrants with work visas.

In the Senate, the bill is sponsored by (who else?) Sen. Bill Ketron. The legislation is being pushed by the Tennessee Eagle Forum, the same organization behind Ketron's bill last year that would have criminalized Shariah law.

After passing on a voice vote today, Ketron's latest is fast on its way to the floor of both chambers. It passed the Senate's Education Committee last week. This afternoon, in an email blast to media, the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition decried the legislation, calling it a "thinly veiled attack on Muslims." The release, after the jump:

Nashville - HB3540, the "Eliminating Diversity in Charter Schools" bill, passed the House Education Committee this afternoon on a voice vote. The legislation was drafted by the Tennessee Eagle Forum, as a continuation of their controversial, anti-Muslim campaign from last year. As originally introduced, HB3540 would prevent any noncitizen from serving on the board of a charter school; in its current form, the bill establishes arbitrary restrictions on the nationality and ethnicity of teachers, regardless of their qualifications or suitability for the subject matter.

HB3540 and its Senate counterpart are being sponsored by Senator Ketron (R-Murfreesboro) and Representative Matheny (R-Tulahoma), the same sponsors as the Eagle Forum's 2011 bill that would have equated sharia and the practice of Islam with terrorism.

The following is a statement from Sabina Mohyuddin, a Muslim community leader in Tulahoma, and board member of the American Muslim Advisory Council:

"We understand the intention behind this bill and it is unfortunate that our elected officials are playing the same game as last year trying to marginalize Tennessee Muslims. No lawmaker should support legislation that prevents immigrants from fully engaging in their children's education. This bill was designed to exclude immigrant parents and teachers from participating in charter schools, frustrating efforts to tailor our kids' education to meet the needs of our communities.

"Today's vote reflects not only a radical new effort to regulate the charter school system, but also the ability of a handful of legislators and lobbyists to derail the legislative agenda with mean-spirited, anti-immigrant proposals. This is an anti-Muslim bill shrouded in anti-immigrant language, and represents the latest effort of a radical, special interest group to make Tennessee unwelcoming to people from other countries."

Ketron tells Pith he'd like to see TIRRC show how the bill, which makes no reference to religion, is anti-Muslim. He says it's about preserving jobs for qualified homegrown teachers and wondered



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why the TIRRC didn't issue such a denunciation of a **seemingly similar bill** sponsored by Senate Democratic Caucus Chairman Lowe Finney, which Ketron felt was unconstitutional. At least his bill allows 3.5 percent of a school staff to be made up of folks who aren't from around here, Ketron said — just in case the school needs to find someone to teach Chinese or something like that.

"In my opinion, we have well qualified teachers here in Tennessee," he said. "We should make those offers first to them. That's why my bill is different from Sen. Finney's bill. I felt his was unconstitutional because it didn't allow anyone to come in with an H1B visa. Mine puts a 3 percent cap — from the principal to the teacher to any staff person — they're allowed to come in with those visas. Especially if they need to go after someone who teaches Mandarin Chinese or they teach some other foreign language that they want to teach in a charter school."

As for the provision about disclosing gifts from far-flung lands, Ketron said that's just a matter of transparency.

We asked TIRRC about their apparent silence on Finney's bill, which among other restrictions would have barred anyone who isn't a "lawful permanent resident of the United States" from being employed as a charter school teacher. At first, a spokesman says, the legislation didn't cause them much concern because they assumed it wouldn't get far. The Ketron bill has their attention, he said, because it's currently advancing, while Finney's bill is dead in the water.

Pressed for an explanation as to why a similar bill sponsored by would-be allies didn't provoke a similar reaction, the TIRRC spokesman said he'd get back to us with an explanation from the group's policy arm. We'll update here if we hear back.

UPDATE: TIRRC communications coordinator emails this statement to Pith:

"TIRRC was one of many groups that expressed concerns about both charter school bills and their potential unintended consequences at the beginning of this legislative session. Perhaps SB2654 was placed in the General Subcommittee because its sponsors heard concerns from the community and decided to better understand the consequences of the bill before moving forward. What is certain is that the Tennessee Eagle Forum is using SB3345 as the latest installment to their own anti-Muslim agenda for this legislative session."

Tags: [Tennessee Eagle Forum](#), [Bill Ketron](#), [Lowe Finney](#), [Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition](#), [charter schools](#), [Shariah law](#)

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So TIRRC is unwilling to say flat out that Finney's bill is anti-immigrant. I understand why they didn't bother putting out a press release about a non-moving bill, but when pushed to explain their stance they should have said it was wrong. Good to know they care more about pleasing the Democrats than advocating for their issue.

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Posted by [spineless](#) on April 3, 2012 at 6:17 PM



So what are the Muslims worried about? Surely their funding is totally transparent and immune to criticism. The Scene keeps telling us we have nothing to worry about - doesn't that make us all feed secure?

I sure have no problem holding the Catholic schools in TN to the same standard. They should divulge any foreign investments that support them as well.

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Posted by [davidlongfellow](#) on April 3, 2012 at 9:07 PM



It amazes me that TCP and Nashville Scene never see any threats except in our own elected legislature. The Mosque and their funding, operations, and policies and leadership are above any reproach! Should a Saudi funded school with a Saudi Cleric in the country on a work visa be less worrisome to the press than a Republican elected Representative or State Senator?

Selective concerns appears to be the major point of almost all stories or articles!

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NeverFear



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Posted by NeverFear on April 4, 2012 at 7:30 AM

This bill is almost certainly unconstitutional. Ketron's racism seems to be running at full speed, and Finney joins the "me, too" crowd of cowardly Democrats. Both of them ought to be ashamed.

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Posted by Perry Aubric on April 4, 2012 at 8:56 AM

"In my opinion, we have well qualified teachers here in Tennessee," he said. If he truly believes that, why didn't he oppose Sen. Summerville's bill to allow unlicensed people to teach in Tennessee's K-12 schools last year?

BTW, I found out the reason behind this year's bill to allow college professors to teach in K-12 schools. Sen. Summerville is an adjunct professor at a local community college, and he wants to be able to teach in K-12 schools without going through the process of earning a Tennessee teaching license.

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Posted by Min on April 4, 2012 at 10:02 AM

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