THE JAMES MADISON INSTITUTE
A FOUNDATION FOR FLORIDA'S FUTURE

MADISON OP-ED SERIES

The James Madison Institute

P.O. Box 37460 • Tallahassee, FL 32315 • (850) 386-3131

http://JamesMadison.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 5, 2000

EDITOR: Please consider this Madison Op-Ed for the Commentary page or for broadcast as a guest editorial. Reprint permission is granted.

CONTACT:

Vel Johnson

If You Care about Education, Read This

By Peter Doherty

Sixty years ago after Nazi bombs destroyed Britain's Houses of Parliament, Prime Minister Winston Churchill was offered advice about rebuilding. The chambers, he was told, were too small, dark, and uncomfortable. "Make them bigger, brighter, and more inviting," his advisors said.

The Prime Minister thought for awhile and then answered, "No. First we shape our buildings and then they shape us. Build them back exactly as they were." The same can be said of our governmental institutions. First we shape them, then they shape our society.

Floridians who care about education should keep Churchill's comment in mind in the coming months. The Governor, Senate President, and Speaker of the House will soon make 11 of the most important education policy appointments ever made in the state. Those selected will sit on a newly created commission charged with directing a top-to-bottom overhaul of all state education functions—from the state universities down to kindergarten. This commission was mandated in a newly passed reorganization bill made necessary by a 1998 state constitutional amendment that creates an appointed State Board of Education and Commissioner of Education. The amendment takes effect in January 2003.

The 11-member transition commission will have a huge job. Not only must it develop a plan for effectively governing all of education, but it must also deal with some thorny, and politically supercharged, issues the 2000 Florida Legislature sidestepped while considering the reorganization act. Among these is the question of whether to discard Florida's Board of Regents that, under one name or another, has governed the state universities since 1905, and the larger question of whether the reorganization scheme fits Florida's needs at all. The former question has already generated controversy, but the latter may prove harder to answer.

If you care about education—

Floridians who care about education should keep Churchill's comment in mind in the coming months.

-more-

and you should because in education is found our future—watch this commission closely. Nothing in recent years can compare to it in importance.

###

Peter Doherty, Ph.D., is a senior policy analyst with The James Madison Institute in Tallahassee. He may be contaced via e-mail at peterd@jamesmadison.org.

Published by The James Madison Institute one of a series of short articles on issues important to Florida and the nation. Nothing in The Madison Op-Ed Series should be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The James Madison Institute or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation.

Copyright 2000. Permission is hereby granted to reprint or broadcast this article, with appropriate credit given to the author and The James Madison Institute. Please send tearsheets to The James Madison Institute, P.O. Box 37460, Tallahassee, Florida 32315-7460.