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*Now more than ever before, the people are responsible for the character of the Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless, and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness, and corruption. If it be intelligent, brave, and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities to represent them in the national legislature... If the next centennial does not find us a great nation... it will be because those who represent the enterprise, the culture, and the morality of the nation do not aid in controlling the political forces.*

President James Garfield

**Early Education Listening Tour Kicks Off**

The Department of Education (DOE) kicked off its “[Listening and Learning](#) about Early Learning” tour last week at the DOE’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Administration has put a heavy [emphasis](#) on early education. President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have repeatedly stated that education reform must have a focus on early learning initiatives that concentrate on children “birth to five.” The President [stated](#) this past February to the joint session of Congress, “It will be the goal of this Administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education – from the day they are born to the day they begin a career... We have dramatically expanded early childhood education and will continue to improve its quality, because we know that the most formative learning comes in those first years of life.”

Department of Education’s Senior Advisor for Early Learning Dr. Jacqueline Jones has joined with Health and Human Services’ Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development Joan Lombardi in hosting forums in several cities around the country to discuss different aspects of advancing early education initiatives. During the kickoff meeting in D.C., the American Association of Christian Schools voiced and submitted comments to the DOE that represented concerns over federal involvement into the lives of young children.

Maureen Wiebe, AACCS Legislative Director, shared with the attendees the essential component of a parent’s role in a young child’s life as well as the success of private pre-k programs around the nation. She attributed this success to their autonomy and mission as well as the tremendous emphasis private Christian schools put on the parental and family role in a child’s life. She commented, “Without question, quality parenting is the best predictor of a child’s future success and development emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually. Any early education that a child receives beyond the home can serve to enhance a child’s experiences but should never supplant the parents’ role in providing the education and direction for these young children.” She further stated that “autonomy also aids the non-public school in employing highly qualified teachers as the principals have the authority and autonomy to hire the best teachers that align with the mission and vision of the school. This serves to ensure that the teachers and administration of the school have the same strong commitment to the education of the children.”

This past week the tour traveled to Denver, CO, discussing the issue of the “Workforce and Professional Development” in relation to early learning programs. The topic at the meeting next week in Orlando, FL, will be “Family Engagement”; and the tour will end in Chicago, IL, with a discussion on “Standards and Assessments.” If you would like attend these meetings in person, watch through the web, or submit comments, please click [here](#).

### **Supreme Court Allows Mojave Desert Cross to Stand**

The Supreme Court reached a 5-4 decision this week to [allow](#) a 75-year-old, 6 ½ foot cross that was erected in 1934 in the Mojave Desert to remain as a memorial to the fallen soldiers during the First World War. For eight years, the battle over the memorial has raged after the ACLU claimed constitutional concerns about the cross existing on public land. In 2004, Congress authorized a land transfer to private individuals in order to extinguish these concerns, yet the complaints continued. Last fall, the nation’s highest court heard [oral arguments](#) on the case. Representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Kelly Shackelford, director of Liberty Legal Institute, stated, “The real goal of the veterans group is to stop this really disgraceful conduct of having war memorials that have been up for 75 years coming under attack because of political correctness or whatever mood of the day. This was not put up by the government. It was put up by veterans. This is the symbol they chose.”

Justice Kennedy was the swing vote who decided with Chief Justice Roberts, Justices Alito, Thomas, and Scalia. In writing to explain his decision, Justice Kennedy [wrote](#) that the cross “is not merely a reaffirmation of Christian beliefs.” Rather, he said, “One Latin cross in the desert evokes far more than religion. It evokes thousands of small crosses in foreign fields marking the graves of Americans who fell in battles, battles whose tragedies are compounded if the fallen are forgotten.”

Justice Stevens, offering the [dissenting](#) opinion, wrote that fallen soldiers deserve a memorial but believed the government “cannot lawfully do so by continued endorsement of a starkly sectarian message.” While the memorial has been allowed to remain at the site, a battle continues to get the plywood removed from covering the cross. To watch a short clip on the history of the cross please click [here](#).

Justice Stevens also announced his retirement this month, and the President is expected to name his replacement to the Court in the weeks to follow. While Stevens is arguably the most liberal Justice on the court, conservatives are concerned with the President’s future nominee. Though the President has stated there will be no litmus test when deciding the next possible Justice, he did state he will choose someone who will respect the rights of women and uphold *Roe v. Wade*. Americans United for Life [believes](#) the nominee will most likely be the current U.S. Solicitor General, Elena Kagan. Kagan has repeatedly voiced her support for abortion rights and has criticized any and all regulations placed on abortion. According to AUL, she has also “authored a memo stating that faith-based groups that operate pregnancy care centers should be excluded from counseling pregnant teens.”

### **Study Released: Practice of Religion Benefits Society**

Dr. Patrick Fagan, senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Family and Religion for the Family Research Council, recently released the results of a ten year study which prove that the practice of religion is indeed a strong remedy to many of our nation’s social problems. His report, entitled *How Society Works: In the Context of The War Against It’s Foundation (The Long Slow March through the Institutions)*, shows that the five basic institutions of society (government, market, school, family, and church) have positive outcomes when religion is practiced in the family.

According to Dr. Fagan’s research findings, “Religious belief and practice are associated with higher levels of marital happiness and stability, stronger parent-child relationships, greater educational aspirations, higher levels of good work habits, greater longevity and physical health, and higher recovery rates from addictions to alcohol or drugs.” In addition, religious belief and practice lead to “lower divorce rates, lower cohabitation rates, lower rates of out-of-wedlock births, lower levels of teen sexual activity, less abuse of alcohol and drugs, lower rates of suicide and depression, less juvenile crime, less violent crime, and less domestic violence.”

In light of these findings, Dr. Fagan also addressed the concern that our society today is trying not just to steer away from religion and marriage but to do away with them altogether through bills such as allowing homosexuals to marry and a court ruling the National Day of Prayer as unconstitutional. Organizations such as [Freedom from Religion](#) are trying to separate God and government, even though our Founding Fathers recognized faith in God as vital to our country's success. Dr. Fagan's solution is not just to allow freedom of religion but to protect and promote it. "At the federal, state, and local levels, policymakers should work to encourage an environment in which religious institutions and organizations can thrive and citizens can actively practice their faith--both privately and publicly."

To read a detailed summary of Dr. Fagan's findings from over ten years of research through studies and polls, [click here](#).

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### **In Case You Missed It:**

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Obama Administration Appeals National Day of Prayer Ruling](#)

[FDA to Consider "Better" Morning after Pill](#)

[Franklin Graham Invitation to Speak at Pentagon Rescinded](#)



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