



A Publication of the American Association of Christian Schools

The Washington Flyer
November 21, 2014

Perhaps no custom reveals our character as a Nation so clearly as our celebration of Thanksgiving Day.

Rooted deeply in our Judeo-Christian heritage, the practice of offering thanksgiving underscores our unshakeable belief in God as the foundation of our Nation and our firm reliance upon Him from Whom all blessings flow.

President Ronald Reagan, Thanksgiving Day, 1986

Victory for Pastors' Housing Tax Exemption

Last week the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals [overturned](#) a 2013 ruling from a lower court which had declared the housing tax exemption for pastors to be unconstitutional. The case involved a lawsuit filed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), in which the outspoken atheist group claimed that the housing allowance granted to clergy violated the First Amendment, and federal district judge Barbara Crabb agreed. While the lower court ruling applied only to ministers in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, the initial ruling by Judge Crabb caused grave concern to pastors nationwide, and several religious organizations urged an appeal. The recent decision of the 7th Circuit Court reversed Crabb's decision on the grounds that the FFRF lacked standing in the case because the housing allowance did not directly affect the FFRF. The opinion stated, "Absent any personal denial of a benefit, the plaintiffs' claim amounts to nothing more than a generalized grievance about [the parsonage allowance's] unconstitutionality, which does not support standing." According to the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a group which filed an amicus brief in the case, the tax exemption is [vital](#) for three important reasons: "It ensures that ministers are treated the same as similar nonreligious employees; it reduces tax discrimination among ministers from wealthy and poor denominations; and it keeps the government from making intrusive judgments about how ministers use their homes. Without the allowance, many minority or poor faith groups would have difficulty providing for their ministers." The 60-year-old tax provision benefits ministers, priests, rabbis, and imams nationwide.

Child Care Development Block Grant Is Signed by the President

An education-related bill with bi-partisan support has [passed](#) both Houses of Congress and has now been signed by the President. The Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDB) provides financial aid to states to help low-income families afford child care for children ages 13 years and younger while the parents work or attend school. The CCDB was passed earlier this year by the Senate, and sent over to the House where minor changes were made before its passage in September. Last week, the Senate passed 88-1 the revised version of the bill and sent it to the White House. The CCDB was first enacted in 1990 and has been due for reauthorization since 1996. Rep. Todd Rokita (IN) of the House Education Committee made the following [statement](#) regarding the changes made for the reauthorization: "I'm proud to reauthorize the Child Care Development Block Grant program with changes that strengthen parental choice, increase safety standards for providers, rein in an overzealous federal government, and maintain the program's essential purpose as work support with state flexibility."

White House Announces Summit on Early Education

The Obama Administration will be hosting a White House [Summit on Early Education](#) on December 10, 2014, to bring together philanthropists, businessmen, educators, and stakeholders who are interested in advancing the President's plan to expand early education for children from birth to five years. During the Summit, the White House plans to announce the recipients of the Preschool Development Block Grant \$250 million competition, the most recent Race to the Top program which incentivizes states to enact changes and reforms which would increase the number of children in publicly-funded preschools and early learning centers. A total of 35 states and Puerto Rico submitted applications for this competition. While advancing early education has been a top priority for President Obama's education agenda, private organizations, including the AACS, have expressed concern over an expansion of government involvement in early education as it will undoubtedly infringe on parental rights as well as the opportunities available through autonomous private and faith-based preschool centers. Conservative organizations such as the Heritage Foundation have also raised [questions](#) about the purported success of existing government preschool programs, and thus raised issue with the necessity of advancing universal preschool through additional government programs.

Low Scores Predicted for Common Core Tests

The Smarter Balanced testing consortium, one of the two standardized tests created to align with the Common Core Standards (CCS), is [projecting](#) widespread low scores from students who take the tests this school year. This will be the first year for 17 different states to implement the Smarter Balanced assessment, and creators of the test predict that only about one-third of students will score at or above the proficiency level for math and about 40 percent will score the same for English. They explain that these low scores should be more a reflection of the high expectations of the CCS rather than an indication of students' lack of ability (or the inadequacy of the CCS). However, teachers and parents in states that have already implemented the CCS-aligned tests have expressed strong concern over the drastic drop in students' scores, and many believe that this recent announcement is an effort to [prepare](#) the families and students in the 17 states that will be implementing the tests for lower scores.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[The Marriage Issue in the 2016 Elections](#)

[Christian Colleges Dilemma in a Post-Christian Society](#)

[Methodist Pastor Charged For Refusing to Officiate Same-Sex Wedding](#)

Correction

Last week's *Washington Flyer* article on the Wisconsin school choice program incorrectly stated that the Milwaukee choice program doubled from 500 to 1,000. The Milwaukee voucher program has over 20,000 students enrolled. Outside the city of Milwaukee, the statewide Wisconsin Parental Choice Program has grown from 500 students to 1,000.

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, there will be no issue of The Washington Flyer next week. We will resume the following week. We wish a blessed Thanksgiving to all our readers and our AACS ministries.