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“Unless we form the habit of going to the Bible in bright moments as well as in trouble, we cannot fully respond to its consolations because we lack equilibrium between light and darkness.”

Helen Keller

Religious Freedom Victory in Mississippi

On Tuesday, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant [signed into law](#) a bill that protects the religious freedom of those who act and operate according to a belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. The bill, titled Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act (HB 1523), protects not just religious institutions and professions such as churches and pastors but also extends to public officials and business owners, including wedding vendors, who choose to conduct their professional work according to their religious beliefs regarding marriage. Those opposing the new law claim it allows for discrimination against the LGBT community, but in reality the law simply prevents the state government from discriminating against those who act according to a deeply held religious belief in man-woman marriage. Upon signing the bill, the Governor made the following [statement](#): “I am signing HB 1523 into law to protect sincerely held religious beliefs and moral convictions of individuals, organizations and private associations from discriminatory action by state government or its political subdivisions, which would include counties, cities and institutions of higher learning.” He further explained, “This bill merely reinforces the rights which currently exist to the exercise of religious freedom as stated in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.” In the face of big businesses threatening the state because of supposed discrimination, several conservative organizations joined with the Mississippi Center for Public Policy to show support for the bill. Recognizing the importance of this issue to the religious liberty of Christian schools, the AACCS sent a letter to the governor prior to his signing and encouraged him to remain strong in his purpose to protect religious freedom. The letter stated in part: “After the Supreme Court decision finding a right to gay marriage, it stands to follow that institutions that hold to a truth about marriage in opposition to this new constitutional right will become marginalized in greater society. Removal of tax exemption is more than a financial hardship: it will delegitimize our institutions and the very important benefit they provide to each community they serve. If liberty means anything, it must mean that everyone has the right to think and believe freely and to live out those beliefs in the public square. Government must protect differing opinions in society—especially ones where so much is at stake. The best way to ensure the conversation about the nature of marriage is not silenced by government coercion is to move to protect free speech and religious liberty rights.”

Victory for School Choice in Montana

Last Thursday in Montana, District Judge David Ortley [ruled](#) that children attending religious schools cannot be excluded from the state scholarships awarded under Montana’s School Choice program. In 2015, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 410, a bill that established tax credits of up to \$150 for donations to private scholarship funds. After the bill became law, the Revenue Department issued a rule which prohibited the use of those scholarships for students attending faith-based schools. Last December, on behalf of several mothers with children enrolled at a local Christian school, the Institute for Justice filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the rule barring Christian school students from the scholarship program. In his ruling, Judge

Ortley stated that the law was intended “to provide parental and student choice in education” and that the prohibition created by this rule against faith-based schools was a “complete barrier” for the plaintiff’s children in competing for the scholarship funds. “Thursday’s ruling was a resounding victory for parents and kids,” said Jeff Laszloffy, Montana Family Foundation president. “It’s a pathway for students to succeed, whether they need public school or a private school to do it.”

AACS to Host National Competition

Next week, 1800 students from almost 200 schools in 29 states will travel to South Carolina to compete in the AACS National Competition. This annual competition offers students the opportunity to compete in 76 categories in the areas of Bible, music, speech, art, and academics. We wish everyone the best in the competition and look forward to an exciting week. For regular updates throughout the week, please follow us on twitter ([@aacs_dc](#)) or like us on Facebook ([AACS Legislative Office](#)). As our AACS staff will be busy with the competition, there will not be a *Washington Flyer* next week. The *Flyer* will resume the following week.

AACS Youth Legislative Training Conference

Each summer, AACS hosts high school juniors and seniors in Washington, D.C., for the [Youth Legislative Training Conference](#). This unique program gives students the opportunity to view the U.S. legislative process from a biblical perspective. Throughout the week-long conference, students attend a Congressional briefing, participate in a mock Senate, tour several historical sites, and visit their Congressmen. Interested students should apply through their state association. For more information, contact the AACS Legislative Director [Jamison Coppola](#) (email or call: 202-547-2991).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[FRC Action Presidential Voter Guide](#)

[Standing Up for Religious Liberty](#)

[Politics is Still Downstream from Culture](#)

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