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*“It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the Providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and to humbly implore His protection and favor.”*

***George Washington***

**House of Representatives Passes DC School Choice Bill**

Last week, the House of Representatives voted 224-181 [to pass H.R. 4901](#), the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (SOAR Act), the bill to reauthorize the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP). Created in 2004, this program provides the opportunity for DC parents to choose the best private or public school for their child through a lottery selection system that provides scholarships. Despite the overwhelming success rate of the program, the bill has faced opposition from the Obama Administration throughout the last several years with numerous attempts to defund or stop the program. The only federally funded school choice program in the nation, the DCOSP enjoys a [high success rate](#) for participating students. In 2015, the program boasted a 90% graduate rate (compared to just over 50% for DC public schools). Overall, an average of 92% of graduates continue on to college. The House-passed bill provides for a three-pronged approach to the education funding for DC, with one-third of the funds going to public schools, one-third to charter schools, and one-third going to the DCOSP. The bill now waits for a Senate vote.

**School Choice Is Good for School Improvement**

According to a recently released [report](#), school choice programs actually encourage the improvement of public schools. Published by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, the report analyzes data from the National Assessment of Education Progress that measures the performance of schools in math and reading and also evaluates school choice programs across the country to determine any correlation. Interestingly, the authors note that while educational spending has increased over 300% since the 1970s, student scores “have improved only modestly.” However, in areas where there is taxpayer-funded choice such as charter schools, vouchers, tax credits, and education savings accounts, the competition that these choice programs inherently demand causes improvement in the academics and success rate of the district schools. The report also offers recommendations to maximize education reforms that encourage choice and competition for parents and students.

**DOE Releases List of Colleges Seeking Religious Exemption**

First enacted in 1972, Title IX was passed in an effort to provide equal opportunity for female athletes by requiring equal opportunities for males and females in schools that receive federal funds. However, the DOE issued new guidance in 2014 extending protection from discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity. A religious exemption is allowed upon request for faith-based institutions, and many religious schools have notified the Department of Ed that they are using the law’s exemption in order to operate according to their religious beliefs. [Citing pressure](#) from LGBT groups and from a group of Senators, the DOE posted a list of colleges and universities that have sought an exemption. Although the published list of these schools seems intended to shame the schools and claim they are discriminatory, Alliance Defending Freedom attorney Greg Baylor pointed out this could actually prove to be helpful to families “as it identifies schools that are skeptical about allowing biological males to use bathrooms, showers, locker rooms and dormitories designed and set

aside for women.” He further explains that while some will try to use the list to “punish and marginalize” the schools, he believes that the “schools will respond with both conviction and civility, using the spotlight to share not only God’s design for humanity, but the grace He extends to all of us when we depart from that design.”

### **Abortion Debate Blocks HHS Nominee**

Republicans are [putting a hold](#) on Mary Wakefield’s nomination to be Deputy Secretary for Health and Human Services (HHS), the second most powerful position in the Department. In a session held last week, the Senate Finance Committee approved three other nominees for various positions but left out Wakefield. The delayed approval by the Committee is said to be because of the Department’s refusal to investigate quickly whether California violated federal law in 2014 by requiring abortions to be covered by every health insurer in the state, even those covering pro-life churches and schools that might object to covering abortions. The Weldon Amendment is a federal law that protects health care providers who object to covering abortions, and Republicans are charging the California order is a clear violation of that law. Responsible for enforcing the Weldon Amendment, the HHS Office for Civil Rights opened an investigation into the order in 2014 after the California Catholic Conference filed a complaint. To date the investigation is not complete. The Finance Committee’s top Democrat, Sen. Ron Wyden, stated, “I think she’s very qualified, and she shouldn’t have her nomination caught up in yet another anti-abortion discussion.” Finance Chairman Orrin Hatch declined to discuss the delay but did respond to a question about whether Wakefield’s nomination would ever pass out of committee by stating, “It’s a problem. I don’t know.”

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

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

[Alabama City Restricts Bathrooms to Biological Sex](#)

[Spark of Life at Conception](#)

[The Education Debit Card](#)

[National Day of Prayer Observed on May 5](#)

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