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*“When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated,
the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.”*

George Washington

AACS Joins Meeting with Education Secretary DeVos

On Wednesday, AACS Legislative Director Jamison Coppola joined leaders from the National Council for Private School Accreditation in a meeting with Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the work of voluntary private school accreditation programs to the Secretary. During the meeting, Secretary DeVos made positive remarks towards the group, sharing stories of her own personal connection to private schools and her appreciation for the work they do to help students succeed. The diversity of groups attending the meeting included American Montessori Society, Association of Christian Teachers and Schools, and the National Independent Private Schools Association. The AACS offers an accreditation program to their member preschools and K-12 schools, and the meeting with Secretary DeVos gave opportunity to introduce her to AACS and the association’s efforts to help strengthen Christian schools and aid students. Mr. Coppola was able to emphasize that the accrediting organizations form a group of organizations committed to high standards for schools, continuous school improvement, and establishing voluntary accountability measures to help maintain high quality in their member schools. After the meeting, Mr. Coppola stated, “We are grateful for the Secretary’s recognition of the work of private schools and her efforts to listen to private school organizations who are working every day to ensure a high quality education for children. We have appreciated the Secretary’s focus on school choice and for recognizing the importance of the principles of federalism and the autonomy of private schools.”

Supreme Court Declines Review of Religious Liberty Case

The Supreme Court recently [declined](#) to review the case *Sterling v. United States* in which U.S. Marine Monica Sterling was court-martialed for refusing to remove Bible verses from her work station. Her superior had ordered her to take down a posted paraphrase of Isaiah 54:16 (“No weapon formed against me shall prosper”), and after she refused, she was eventually charged with six different misconduct charges, ranging from insubordination to disrespect. The Liberty Institute and former U.S. Solicitor General Paul Clement defended her, offering the argument that her religious liberty was violated under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a law which states the government cannot “burden religious exercise without compelling justification.” However, a Court of Appeals ruled that the RFRA does not apply to this case because there was not a significant burden placed on her religious exercise. The Supreme Court’s denial to review the case means that the ruling by the Appeals Court will stand. The AACS joined an amicus brief that was submitted to the Supreme Court by Christian Legal Society and offered a thorough explanation as to why RFRA would apply to

this case and would provide the necessary protection for Sterling's religious liberty. Thirty-six Members of Congress also filed an amicus brief supporting the argument that RFRA should apply to this case. Conservatives following the case note that the decision of the Appeals Court, which is now final, is concerning in that it gives power to a court to determine what actions can be religiously motivated, and also it requires that an accommodation be requested, even though RFRA does not require this.

Planned Parenthood's Government Funding Belies Services Offered

Planned Parenthood of the Heartland recently announced that they will be closing four clinics in Iowa, continuing the trend of closures for their clinics since 2012. These are just a few of the over 15 Planned Parenthood abortion clinics nationwide that plan to close or have already closed this year. In addition to these closures, the recently released annual report by Planned Parenthood shows there has been a 66% decrease in health prevention services offered in clinics, and the total number of people served has fallen by 22.5%. However, the same report shows that federal funding has increased by 64.7%, overall revenue is up by 33%, and the number of abortions performed in Planned Parenthood clinics has risen by 13%. The disparity between the decrease of health services offered and the increase in federal funding and abortions performed has reinforced the cry of social conservatives to defund Planned Parenthood and divert the government funding to comprehensive health centers that do not offer abortions.

Montana Judge Rules in Favor of School Choice

Last Thursday, a Montana judge [ruled](#) in favor of school choice by concluding that the state cannot exclude students who attend religious schools from being eligible to receive scholarships under Montana's School Choice program. At issue was SB 410, a law the Montana state legislature passed last year which offered tax credits of up to \$150 for donations given to private scholarship funds. District Judge David Ortley said that the state Department of Revenue had exceeded its authority when it barred religious schools from participating in the program by excluding them in the list of "qualified education providers." The Department, which argued that the state Constitution bars any form of "direct and indirect payments or appropriations to religious or sectarian schools," is considering its options in light of the decision. Jeff Laszloffy, president of the Montana Family Foundation, praised the ruling, stating, "Thursday's ruling was a resounding victory for parents and kids. It's a pathway for students to succeed, whether they need public school or a private school to do it."

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Survey Shows College Students Support School Choice](#)

[Lighthouse Christian Academy Press Release Concerning House Appropriations Hearing May 24, 2017](#)

[Heritage Report: Education Savings Accounts for Military Families](#)

Jamison Coppola: Legislative Director
Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst
Legislative Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003
Phone: 202.547.2991 Fax: 202.547.2992