



**The Washington Flyer**  
**June 16, 2017**

*“Religious freedom does not exist because of America—America exists because of religious freedom.”*  
**Sen. James Lankford (OK)**

### **Senator Sanders Criticizes Christian Faith During Confirmation Hearing**

In a recent confirmation hearing for Russell Vought, the nominee for the position of deputy director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, Sen. Bernie Sanders took the unprecedented step of criticizing the nominee for his Christian faith, charging that his belief system was reason enough to keep him from public service. During the [questioning](#), Sen. Sanders referred to a 2016 article written by Russell Vought in which he defended the beliefs and practice of Wheaton College after the institution found itself embroiled in controversy over the firing of a professor who had expressed solidarity with Muslims. In his article, Vought stated, “Muslims do not simply have a deficient theology. They do not know God because they have rejected Jesus Christ, His Son, and they stand condemned.” In the confirmation hearing, Sen. Sanders quoted this statement and then followed with the question to Vought, “Do you believe that that statement is Islamophobic?” Vought quickly replied, “Absolutely not. I’m a Christian, and I believe in a Christian set of principles based on my faith.” He further explained that the post in question was in defense of his alma mater (Wheaton College) and their “statement of faith that includes the centrality of Jesus Christ for salvation.” Yet, Sen. Sanders continued to press Vought aggressively, often interrupting him, and posed again the pointed question, “Do you think that people who are not Christians are going to be condemned?” Vought calmly replied, “Thank you for probing on that question. As a Christian, I believe that all individuals are made in the image of God and are worthy of dignity and respect regardless of their religious beliefs. I believe that as a Christian that’s how I should treat all individuals.” Sen. Sanders responded, “I would simply say, Mr. Chairman that this nominee is really not someone who this country is supposed to be about.” Only one other Senator, Chris Van Hollen (MD), joined Sen. Sanders in his criticism of Vought’s Christian faith, calling it a matter of determining whether the nominee could treat all people with equality. However, Sen. Sanders has received much criticism from Christian leaders, among them Family Research Council’s president Tony Perkins who started a [petition](#) calling for a public apology from Sanders. Sen. James Lankford (OK) also spoke to the gravity of Sen. Sanders’ comments in a [post](#), calling Sanders’ questioning about religion “dangerously close to crossing a clear constitutional line for how we evaluate qualifications for public service.” Sen. Lankford further explained, “Article VI of the US Constitution clearly states: ‘no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any Office of public Trust under the United States.’ We cannot say we have the free exercise of religion and also require people to practice their faith only in a way that government officials prefer. Many faith traditions have complex and exclusive theological beliefs, and whether we agree with them or not, those diverse beliefs are protected by the Constitution. The freedom to be Christian, Yezidi, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, or another religion is an American right, and the United States Senate must not waver in our protection of that diversity and freedom. Religious freedom does not exist because of America—America exists because of religious freedom.”

## **Heritage Foundation Urges School Choice for Military Families**

As the Trump administration is taking steps to advance a national school choice program, the Heritage Foundation has proposed the government begin by offering school choice to children in military families. The [proposal](#), titled “A GI Bill for Children of Military Families: Transforming Impact Aid into Education Savings Accounts,” recommends the transformation of the \$1.3 billion of Impact Aid funds into Education Savings Accounts (ESA’s) which military parents could use toward a variety of services to meet the educational needs of their children, including private school tuition, tutoring, and educational therapy. The Impact Aid program was authorized shortly after World War II to fund schools on military bases and also to compensate school districts that serve children in military families. Due to the financial status and movement of military families, most educational options are usually limited to schools on military bases, homeschooling, or local public schools, and the lack of good educational options is often a reason military families leave active service. There are approximately [800,000 children](#) of active military families that would benefit from this plan to expand school choice nationwide. Authors Lindsey Burke and Anne Ryland also contend that expanding educational options will serve to strengthen military families and will in turn strengthen national defense.

## **Ohio Legislature Considers Bill to Ban Abortions After Heartbeat Is Detected**

Last week, another effort was begun in the Ohio House of Representatives to outlaw abortions on babies who have detectable heartbeats. The legislation, introduced by Representatives Ron Hood and Christina Hogan is commonly known as the [Heartbeat Bill](#). If passed, the legislation would protect unborn children from abortion beginning around 21 days after conception—the earliest point at which a heartbeat is detectable. “I believe that children with beating hearts deserve protection in the state of Ohio, and we should work toward that effort regardless of what the political climate ever looks like,” stated Rep. Hogan, the youngest female Representative ever to be elected to the Ohio state House. She continued, “You can’t get distracted by variables you can’t control. Every chance we have to debate this, we have an opportunity to change hearts and minds on the issue.” The bill currently has 48 cosponsors in the House. Last year, Ohio Governor John Kasich vetoed similar legislation, claiming such a law would create too much litigation. He did, however, sign into law a bill that bans abortion at 20 weeks, the point at which babies can feel pain. Currently, [43 states](#) have laws that limit or prohibit abortions at some point during a baby’s prenatal development. If passed, the Heartbeat Bill in Ohio would be the most restrictive abortion ban in the nation.

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

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

[Judge Orders YouTube to Remove Latest Planned Parenthood Video](#)

[Church Attendance Trends Around the Country](#)

[Insider Higher Ed Examines DeVos Position on LGBT Rights](#)

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