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“Of the liberty of conscience in matters of religious faith, of speech and of the press; of the trial by jury of the vicinage in civil and criminal cases; of the benefit of the writ of habeas corpus; of the right to keep and bear arms...If these rights are well defined, and secured against encroachment, it is impossible that government should ever degenerate into tyranny.”

James Monroe

Debate over Military School Choice Intensifies

Some Congressmen are considering the possibility of including a school choice measure in the National Defense Authorization Act. Rep. Jim Banks (IN) introduced the Education Savings Accounts for Military Families Act (H.R. 5199) in March, with Senators Ben Sasse (NE) and Tim Scott (SC) also introducing a companion Senate bill. The legislation would establish an educational savings account program for military families that would allow them to use funds for a variety of educational opportunities that would best meet the needs of their children, including tutoring, private school tuition, online classes, and curriculum. The bill also would allow any unused funds to be rolled over into a college fund. According to a [2017 survey by EdChoice](#), 72 percent of veterans or military members support education savings accounts for military families, and another [survey conducted by Military Times](#) showed that 35 percent of military members cited dissatisfaction with their children’s education as a key factor in their decision regarding continuing in active service. Last month, over 2,000 veterans, military spouses and other family members signed a [letter](#) supporting the legislation and requesting the Armed Services Committee to include the bill as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. However, also last month, a letter [sent by the Military Coalition](#) to the leaders of the Armed Services and Education Committees opposed the bill because it proposes using Impact Aid funds to establish the ESA program, meaning Impact Aid funds would go directly to the students rather than to the schools. The Military Coalition claims this would be devastating to the public schools in districts with a large military population. The bill’s key sponsor, Rep. Jim Banks, did note that he is open to other funding possibilities for the ESA program, but also [stated](#) that because of the “the intent of the Impact Aid dollars and the way that it’s developed currently, it makes the most sense to use them in this way to support military families.” When introducing the bill, Rep. Banks also [stressed](#) the importance of school choice as a means to strengthen the military: “My legislation will help improve military readiness by boosting recruitment and retention of our nation’s best and brightest. Expanding educational opportunities for military-dependent children will give parents who serve the peace of mind to focus on their missions.”

The ABCs of School Choice

A helpful guide to schools and parents alike, the EdChoice 2018 edition of *The ABCs of School Choice* is a valuable trove of information on the country's various school choice programs. The book is a "comprehensive guide to every private school choice program in America" and details the student funding, student eligibility, and EdChoice expert feedback for each state. The book contains color-coded graphs and statistics and is well organized for easy navigation. For those interested in policy making and in establishing or expanding a school choice program in their states, the authors also provide a list and comparison of rules and regulations for the various programs, legal information about challenges that have been made to school choice programs, and how these cases were resolved. Most importantly, the book makes the myriad school choice programs easy to understand for even the most unfamiliar parent. *The ABCs of School Choice* is a useful resource for anyone who wants to be more aware of the programs available to help students attend private, Christian schools. The book can be viewed online [here](#).

Court Challenge to Montana's Tax Credit Program

Oral arguments were recently made in the Montana Supreme Court over whether Montana's tax credit scholarship program can legally be used to pay for religious schools. The case, *Espinoza v. Montana Dept. of Revenue*, involves three parents who sued the state when it decided it was unconstitutional for students receiving the tax credit scholarship (enacted in 2015) to attend religious schools. The tax credit is small, limited to a \$150 credit per donor and capped at \$3 million annually. But Montana claims that its Blaine Amendment prohibits state funds from going either directly or indirectly to religious institutions. The Institute for Justice, Becket Fund, and the [Department of Justice](#) (DOJ) have backed the parents in the case. The DOJ's amicus brief states, "By targeting religious conduct for distinctive, and disadvantageous, treatment, Defendants violate the Free Exercise Clause." Case precedent favors the parents' position, with [six other state courts](#) already upholding the constitutionality of tax credit programs. Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court [ruled](#) in *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer* that religious institutions should not be denied an otherwise available benefit simply because they are religious.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[National Academic Standards Have Produced a Lot of Nothing](#)

[How Homeschoolers Defeated California's Push to Take Power from Parents](#)

[Heartbeat Bill, Nation's Toughest, Ok'd by Iowa Lawmakers](#)

[Judicial Update: Senator Lankford Pushes for Gridlock Reform Rules](#)

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