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*“The establishment of Civil and Religious Liberty was the Motive which induced me to the Field—the object is attained—and it now remains to be my earnest wish & prayer, that the Citizens of the United States could make a wise and virtuous use of the blessings placed before them.”*

***George Washington***

**School Choice Battle in West Virginia**

School choice provisions in an education omnibus bill were the [cause for a teacher strike](#) in West Virginia this week. The legislation, SB 451, passed the state Senate in early February and included several benefits for public school teachers, including pay raises, in addition to the creation of an education savings account (ESA) program and charters schools. After an outcry from the teachers’ unions, the House stripped the educational options from the bill except for the allowance of two charter schools. However, the Senate was able to amend the bill to again include the ESA program and seven charter schools, prompting the teachers’ unions to organize a strike this week to protest the choice provisions. This is the second time in the past 13 months that public school teachers in West Virginia have gone on strike; their strike last year was over salary, which resulted in a 5% teacher pay raise. Passage of SB 451 would have increased their salary again. As Garrett Ballengee, executive director of the conservative Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy, pointed out, “While last year’s strike was ostensibly about better pay and benefits, this year’s strike is about depriving families the opportunity that millions of other Americans already enjoy: education choice.” The West Virginia Christian Education Association has been heavily involved in lobbying for the inclusion of the school choice provisions. At a [recent public hearing](#), Dr. Dan Brokke, administrator of Grace Christian School in Huntington, WV, urged the lawmakers “to think about the children” and pointed out that the ESA program provided assistance to students in all types of schools, stating, “Not only would they be a help to students in private schools; public school parents could use them towards extracurricular activities, computers, online classes, college savings plans.” Pastor Keith Wiebe, who also serves at Grace Christian School and Grace Gospel Church, emphasized the core belief that “parents have the responsibility and they need the right to choose what is best for their children.” He pointed out that many states have enacted school choice programs, which offers proof that “options raise the quality in all sectors.” He also stressed that while school choice is necessary to help all types of schools—public, private, home schools and charter schools—ultimately, school choice helps the children. Last month, [hundreds of supporters gathered](#) for a rally in support of school choice and the education savings account program. Despite the strong support for educational options, the teacher strike this week caused the GOP governor to withdraw his support and the legislature to kill SB 451. The focus now is on the passage of a bill that only includes an additional pay raise for public school teachers.

**Religious Schools and the School Choice Debate**

As public support for school choice [continues to grow](#), opposition to the inclusion of religious schools in choice programs is also on the rise. The New Hampshire state legislature is considering a bill (HB 632) which would

specifically repeal the current educational tax credit [program](#) in the state, and the opposition to the program is [based](#) on the fact that the majority of the 51 participating private schools are religious schools. The program already faced a court challenge over religious schools' participation, but this was dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court. Chelsey Youman, senior counsel at the First Liberty Institute, recently addressed the growing animosity towards Christian schools in an op-ed, titled "[What Accounts for the New Attacks on Christian Schools](#)." In addressing the fallacies which drive the opposition, she offers a strong defense of religious liberty and the positive influence of Christian education. She concludes her argument by stating, "When the public attacks one religious educational institution, the effect is felt by all. The religious environment, character, leadership, and worldview that private schools provide to their students owe no fealty to public sensibilities. Religious teachers of all faiths take on the vital calling to develop children in faith and education. And faith-based schools must remain free to be faith-based."

### **Several States Advance the Heartbeat Bill**

While some states are pushing radical pro-abortion legislation, many other states are considering "heartbeat bills" that would protect the lives of unborn babies. Mississippi, Kentucky, Texas, and Oklahoma are some of [at least ten states](#) that are considering [bills](#) to protect unborn children from the moment their heartbeats are detected. Although similar bills in Arkansas, Iowa, and North Dakota have been struck down by the courts as unconstitutional, Ohio governor [Mike DeWine](#) and Mississippi governor Phil Bryant have already vowed to challenge precedent and sign heartbeat bills if they pass the state legislature. Mississippi [state senator Joey Fillingane](#) noted that these heartbeat bills "really emphasize the polar opposite of what's going on in New York or Virginia" and promote "the sanctity of human life and how important it is that we would protect the unborn." Indeed, while New Mexico and Vermont consider bills that may be even [more extreme](#) than the New York law allowing third trimester abortions, a recent Knights of Columbus [poll](#) reports that the vast majority of Americans (81%) and a majority of pro-choice Americans (66%) support restricting abortions to the first three months of pregnancy. The surge of heartbeat bills shows that Americans across the country are taking a firm stand against the radical pro-abortion agenda.

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

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

[President Trump's Remarks at 2019 National Prayer Breakfast Include Life and Religious Liberty](#)

[South Dakota House Approves Restrictions on Teaching About Gender Dysphoria](#)

[Court Dismisses Most Charges Against Woman Who Helped Expose Planned Parenthood](#)

[Vermont Discriminates Against Students from Religious High Schools, Lawsuit Claims](#)