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“Their sacrifice was great, but not in vain. All Americans and every free nation on earth can trace their liberty to the white markers of places like Arlington National Cemetery. And may God keep us ever grateful.”

George W. Bush

Equality Act Passes House Despite Opposition from Conservatives and Feminists

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the [Equality Act \(H.R. 5\)](#) with a vote of [236-173](#). The bill would add “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the list of protected classes under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, radically transforming federal civil rights laws concerning employment, public accommodations, and education. The bill offers no exemptions for organizations and businesses who hold to a biblical view of sexuality, and also partially repeals the existing and once widely-supported Religious Freedom Restoration Act which protects religious liberty against burdensome government interference. In so doing, the bill would essentially enforce one government-sanctioned ideology and punish those who do not conform to it. Conservatives have been outspoken in their concerns regarding the grave threat this bill presents to the religious freedom of charitable civic organizations, churches, Christian schools, medical and creative professionals, employers, parental rights, and individuals. Feminists have also joined the opposition, voicing concern that the bill would hurt women because its far-reaching effects would even extend to Title IX, the law which prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded education programs. In a move which showed the opposition was [making headway](#), the House Democratic leadership pushed the bill through under a closed rule without allowing any amendments, recognizing that any amendment votes had the potential to stop passage of the bill, or, at the very least, put Democrats in uncomfortable voting positions. [Rep. Virginia Foxx](#), the Ranking Member of the Education and Labor Committee, pointed out that, despite the “vast implications for educational institutions and employers,” the bill was only allowed a single hearing by the smallest subcommittee on the Education and Labor Committee rather than an opportunity for the full committee to consider the bill. She further stated, “Its vague and circular definitions of gender identity will lead only to uncertainty, litigation and harm to individuals and organizations that will be forced to comply with a law the authors don’t even seem to understand.” She pointed out the bill would open “schools and workplaces to expanded liability based on, as the bill states, ‘a perception of belief, even if inaccurate, of suspected discrimination.’” She further emphasized her concern that “the bill is alarmingly clear . . . in its meticulous and intentional destruction of religious freedom protection.” The vote was mostly along party lines, with eight Republicans crossing the aisle to join Democrats in supporting this dangerous legislation (Reps. Susan Brooks (IN), Mario Diaz-Balart (FL), Brian Fitzpatrick (PA), Will Hurd (TX), John Katko (NY), Tom Reed (NY), Elise Stefanik (NY), and Greg Walden (OR)). The bill is unlikely to receive a vote in the Republican-controlled Senate, and a White House official has [indicated](#) that President Trump has concerns that the bill “in its current form is filled with poison pills that threaten to undermine parental and conscience rights.” Although it appears unlikely that the bill will make it to the floor of the Senate, efforts are already underway to “break” the bill apart and include its provisions as separate bills or to pass them as parts of other bills and appropriations.

Evaluation of DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

Results from an [evaluation](#) of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) were released last week, showing that participants, although very satisfied in their chosen schools, show no significant academic gains. The OSP is the only federally funded school choice program, offering voucher scholarships to Washington, DC, students from low-income families. The evaluation compared the progress of students who were offered and accepted the vouchers with those who did not receive vouchers over the span of three years (2012–2014). The results showed that [students who received](#) the vouchers feel safer and their attendance rates are higher. In the area of academics, the results showed there was no significant difference in the math and reading scores between those who received the vouchers and those who did not. However, a closer look at the numbers for each year shows that during the first two years, math scores were slightly lower for those who used the vouchers, so the third year actually demonstrated improvement for these students. (The authors of the report [note](#) that “long term effects of the OSP on academic outcomes will remain unanswered” since “Congress mandated that the current evaluation conclude.”) Furthermore, as [Corey DeAngelis notes](#), the DC OSP is cost effective: “The federal evaluation reveals that private schools produce the same academic outcomes for only a third of the cost of the public schools. In other words, school choice is a great investment.”

Alabama and Louisiana Pass Strong Pro-Life Bills

Alabama and Louisiana are the latest states to take major steps toward outlawing abortion on demand. Despite its conflict with *Roe v. Wade*, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey recently signed the Human Life Protection Act, effectively [banning all abortions](#) except in the rare case that the mother’s life is in danger. The law narrowly defines what “life of the mother” means, excluding commonly used definitions such as mental and emotional health. The law does not hold parents liable for an abortion, but it does classify abortion as a Class A felony, with hefty penalties for abortion doctors. [In Louisiana](#), Governor John Bel Edwards has indicated he would sign a heartbeat bill that overwhelmingly passed the state Senate and will soon be considered by the state House. As a Democrat, Gov. Edwards’ support is a break from his party’s position on abortion, but he has [remained strong](#) in his support of life: “My position hasn’t changed. In eight years in the Legislature, I was a pro-life legislator. I’m as consistent as I can be on that point.” The Louisiana heartbeat bill would ban abortion as early as six weeks and penalize abortion doctors, although the penalties are weaker than those in the Alabama bill. These two bills will certainly face legal scrutiny, but supporters like Gov. Ivey have said that is exactly what they want. While *Roe v. Wade* might render the new law unenforceable now, [Gov. Ivey believes](#) that “it is time, once again, for the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit this important matter.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

[School Choice Breaks the Poverty Cycle, Not ‘Adversity Scores’](#)

[LGBT Fund Shut Down, Biblical Investing Soars](#)