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“If thou wouldst rule well, thou must rule for God, and to do that, thou must be ruled by him . . . Those who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants.”

William Penn

West Virginia Passes Education Reform Bill

West Virginia’s Governor Jim Justice has [signed into law](#) a bill which will allow charter schools in West Virginia, a small step towards creating school choice in a state where such a topic has proved to be controversial. The state legislature had considered an education reform bill last February that garnered national attention when public school teachers went on strike in opposition to certain choice provisions included in the bill. Although the legislation would have provided a pay raise and other benefits for public school teachers, the teachers unions successfully urged their members to oppose the bill, claiming the school choice provisions, which would have allowed charter schools and created an education savings account program, would hurt public education. The teacher strike and public demonstrations caused the legislature to table the bill, but WV Governor Jim Justice, a supporter of school choice, promised the issue would be reconsidered at a later date. This past June, the governor called a special legislative session specifically to address education reform, and the legislature passed House Bill 206 which included some, but not all, of the reforms from the previous bill. Signed into law in June, the legislation institutes several reforms to the educational system in the state, including a pay raise for teachers, incentive pay for math and special education teachers, and more local control for county school boards. State senator Roland Roberts, a strong supporter of education reform, notes that one of the best things in the new law is the requirement for greater transparency from the state and county school boards regarding how they spend the public funds they receive. Perhaps one of the most notable reforms is the creation of a charter school program which will allow three charter schools to be established by 2023, with an increase of three charter schools every three years after that. Despite the financial benefits to public school teachers, teachers unions are still [expressing disappointment](#) in the new law, pointing specifically to the creation of charter schools. While the educational savings account program that was originally included in the first bill did not pass, some supporters of school choice believe the allowance for charter schools could open the door for future advancement of school choice initiatives. Robert Holland of the Heartland Institute [stated](#), “With the compromise bill from a special legislative session now signed into law, West Virginia has taken one small step toward parental choice in elementary and secondary education.” Senator Roberts, who also serves as pastor of Victory Baptist Church and administrator for AACCS member school Victory Baptist Academy (Beaver, WV), is also optimistic regarding future initiatives that will improve educational opportunities for students across the state. He stated, “For the first time in West Virginia history, meaningful education reform is beginning and all West Virginians will benefit from that.”

State Department Hosts Religious Freedom Summit

This July, religious leaders from across the world converged in Washington, D.C., to participate in the State Department's second [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#). The Ministerial aims to highlight religious persecution around the world and promote religious freedom in those areas so desperate for religious tolerance. It coincided with the State Department's release of its [2018 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), which reports the condition of religious liberty in every country. This year's Ministerial [focused](#) on several high-profile examples of religious persecution across the globe, especially the torture, imprisonment, and reeducation of Christians and Muslims in China. The Ministerial also gave a platform for survivors of religious attacks to share their stories. Dr. Farid Ahmad extended love and forgiveness to the killer of 51 Muslims in the Christchurch, New Zealand, attacks this year. Yamini Ravindran with the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka spoke of the difficulties survivors of the Easter Sunday bombings still face months after the attack that killed hundreds of Christians. And Rabbi Jeffrey Myers of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, where eleven Jews were murdered during a worship service last year, encouraged attendees to focus more on the good things happening in their communities and country instead of spreading a spirit of hatred and negativity. Through these testimonies and many more, the United States showed itself as a [world leader](#) fighting for religious freedom as a fundamental right to be shared by all people.

Judge Upholds Oklahoma Pro-Life Law that Bans Dismemberment Abortions

On July 12, Oklahoma County District Judge Cindy Truong upheld Oklahoma's ban on dismemberment abortions which became law in 2015. The law forbids the practice of dismemberment abortion, also known as dilation and evacuation, except in the case of preventing serious injury or death to the mother. A lawsuit against the ban has prevented the law from taking effect ever since it was passed. The Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), a pro-abortion group representing the Tulsa Women's Clinic, brought the lawsuit before the Oklahoma court, [decrying](#) the ban as "essentially a back-door ban on abortion itself." CRR said that dismemberment abortions are the standard procedure for dealing with babies in the second trimester. Julie Rinkelman, the director of litigation for CRR, has said that her group is "trying to evaluate all of the next steps" they can take to overturn the ban, including the possibility of appealing the decision to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Oklahoma's Attorney General, Republican Mike Hunter, came out [in support](#) of Judge Truong's ruling. He said, "Dismemberment abortions are barbaric, brutal, and subject unborn children to more cruelty than we allow for death row inmates. . . . Judge Truong is to be commended for declaring this legislation constitutional." Judge Truong is the first judge to review a law banning dismemberment abortions and uphold it. Similar laws have been passed in states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, and Texas, but the courts in each of those states have prevented the law from taking effect.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Abortion Clinic Loses \\$500,000 in Taxpayer Funds](#)

[School Choice Amidst the Sugar Cane](#)

[New Report: School Choice Can Reduce Crime Rate](#)

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