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*“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.”*

***Booker T. Washington***

**President Highlights School Choice, Life, and Religious Liberty in State of the Union Address**

On Tuesday, President Trump delivered a rousing [State of the Union address](#) in which he highlighted the work of his administration over the last three years while also laying out his policy agenda. The inspiring stories of several special guests emphasized his priorities of strengthening the military and honoring our veterans, protecting the border against illegal immigration, advancing educational freedom and reform, and protecting life. The first domestic policy item he addressed was the need to advance a national school choice program. He stated, “The next step forward in building an inclusive society is making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. Yet, for too long, countless American children have been trapped in failing government schools. To rescue these students, 18 states have created school choice in the form of Opportunity Scholarships. The programs are so popular that tens of thousands of students remain on a waiting list.” To emphasize the importance of school choice, he recognized special guests [Stephani and Janiyah Davis](#), a single mom and her 4th-grade daughter who was put on the waiting list for the school choice program in Pennsylvania after the governor vetoed legislation which would have expanded the program for 50,000 students. After announcing that she would receive an opportunity scholarship to attend the school of her choice, he then called on Congress to pass the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunity Act that could provide one million children school choice through the establishment of a national tax credit program. He stated, “No parent should be forced to send a child to a failing government school.” Trump also championed the increase of funding for historically black colleges and universities, his plan to offer vocational and technical education in high schools, his Pledge to American Workers which engages companies to provide education opportunities and new jobs, and the First Lady’s “Be Best” campaign to promote a safe and healthy environment for children.

The speech also highlighted the President’s commitment to the sanctity of life and to religious liberty. In a powerful gesture, the President recognized as a special guest 2-year-old [Ellie Schneider](#), who was one of the youngest babies ever born at just 21 weeks and 6 days, weighing less than a pound. In explaining her incredible story of survival, the President called on Congress to fund neonatal research, and also provided a living example of the humanity of unborn children. He stated, “Whether we are Republican, Democrat, or independent, surely we must all agree that every human life is a sacred gift from God.” The President also reiterated his commitment to protect religious liberty, noting especially the administration’s recent announcement to protect the right to pray in public schools. He stated, “In America, we don’t punish prayer. We don’t tear down crosses. We don’t ban symbols of faith. We don’t muzzle preachers and pastors. In America, we celebrate faith, we cherish religion, we lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the Glory of God.”

## **AACS Submits Public Comments on SALT Regulations**

Last week, the AACS submitted public comments on a SALT (state and local taxes) proposed rule that could have a negative effect on charities and scholarship granting organizations (SGOs). The Treasury Department rule seeks to correct a problem that arose after the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, when the SALT deduction was capped at \$10,000. Some high-tax states, in an effort to work around the new cap, established “pass through” charities which effectively launder local tax dollars so that residents may claim their tax payments as charitable deductions. To prevent states from using pass-through charities, the Treasury proposed to limit the federal charitable deduction. However, that plan to address fake charities will also affect existing charities, including SGOs that are proven to help families afford quality education for their children. The AACS comments urged the Treasury Department to “reconsider its proposed rule and provide an exemption to allow state tax incentives for legitimate charitable organizations like SGOs that have existed for decades to give students a chance at a better education.” The comments also pointed out that legitimate SGOs are privately funded, and lowering the incentive for people to give charitably to SGOs would harm needy students. While the Trump administration has worked diligently to secure a quality education for all children, the proposed SALT rule is a step back from providing quality education choice.

## **National School Choice Week Report**

Last week, schools and families around the country joined together in celebrating the 10th annual National School Choice Week (NSCW) with an estimated 13.7 million participants in over 51,300 events. NSCW began in 2011 as [an effort](#) to “raise awareness about the K–12 education options available to children and families, while spotlighting the benefits of school choice.” What began with 150 events that first year has grown exponentially, with the record number of events this year up from just over 40,000 events last year. In addition to the thousands of rallies and special programs, several governors [issued proclamations](#) declaring the week to be school choice week for their states, and hundreds of state and local leaders also issued statements recognizing the importance of school choice. Additionally, President Trump issued a [Presidential Proclamation](#) marking the event, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos spoke at a school choice rally in Wisconsin, and the Senate passed a bipartisan resolution supporting school choice efforts. And while NSCW might have officially ended, the national dialogue surrounding school choice continues as President Trump and Vice President Pence advocated this week for education freedom. In addition to the President’s comments in the State of the Union address, Vice President Pence said on Wednesday that “our kids . . . should not be sent to the school decided by bureaucrats, or formulas, or their ZIP Code, or their family’s income, but it’s parents who should choose.”

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

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

[Free to Succeed: A Brief History of School Choice](#)

[Study Reveals the Absurd Conformity of Higher Education](#)

[Two Gay Students Are Suing a Seminary: Here’s Why It Matters](#)