



The Washington Flyer
April 16, 2021

“It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor.”
George Washington

AACS Hosts National Fine Arts, Academics, and Bible Competition

This week, the AACS is hosting the annual AACS National Competition through a virtual format, giving students who have captured top honors in their state contests the opportunity to compete on a national level in 72 categories in the areas of Bible, music, speech, art, and academics. The competition will conclude with a special livestream at 7:30pm EDT this evening, Friday, April 16, that will feature special highlights from the competition and an awards ceremony announcing the winners. More information is available on the [Awards Ceremony page](#), along with the public option for viewing the closing event.

West Virginia State Senator Making a Difference for Christian Education

While school choice supporters celebrate the passage of the West Virginia Hope Scholarship Program, Christian schools are grateful for the role of Senator Rollan Roberts in working to ensure the legislation passed. In addition to his work as a state senator, Dr. Roberts serves as the senior pastor of Victory Baptist Church and administrator of Victory Baptist Academy in Beaver, WV, and he previously served for over 20 years on the board of the West Virginia Christian Education Association. During this legislative session, Sen. Roberts had the opportunity to serve as the vice chair for the senate education committee and also as the caucus chairman for the super majority in the state senate, a position which he describes as a “huge, huge divine favor” as it allowed him opportunity to work especially on advancing legislation that would aid and support West Virginia families. The Hope Scholarship Program will provide education savings accounts for families to use towards the best educational method that meets the needs of their child. The program will be available to about 5,200 public school students for the first four years and then will be open to all students, including those in private schools. The successful passage of the bill is especially significant because past attempts to pass school choice in West Virginia have fallen under strong, aggressive opposition from teachers’ unions. However, the 2020 elections gave the state legislature a Republican [super-majority](#) which not only ensured passage of the school choice program, but also stifled the opposing voices of the teachers’ unions that opposed the program on the charge that it syphons money away from public schools. However, while the scholarship amount is equivalent to the amount of state funding per student (approximately \$4,600), public schools will still receive federal and district funds per student, an amount between \$7,000 and \$8,000, regardless of where that student attends school. Senator Roberts points out that this means public schools will still receive approximately 2/3 of the allotted funding per student, while parents will receive 1/3 of the funding for their child. When discussing his work on this bill, he emphasized that it was “relationship-oriented” with discussions “based on mutual respect.” His message in advancing the ESA program was that “it will help struggling children and hurting families.” He added, “Every single teacher and parent knows what I mean when I say struggling students. ‘One size fits all’ is not adequate in public education.” Senator Roberts described this year’s legislative session as a “challenging time” where “great, miraculous things happened.”

Supreme Court Blocks California Restriction on In-home Bible Studies

Last week, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a 5-4 ruling which [blocked the California COVID-19 order](#) which prohibited in-home gatherings of more than three families, an order which was challenged because it barred Bible studies and other religious gatherings in homes. The case, *Tandon v. Newsom*, is the latest in which the Supreme Court has upheld the free exercise of religion over overreaching government-issued mandates in California during the pandemic. The unsigned majority opinion criticized the order, [stating](#), “California treats some comparable secular activities more favorably than at-home religious exercise, permitting hair salons, retail stores, personal care services, movie theaters, private suites at sporting events and concerts, and indoor restaurants to bring together more than three households at a time.” The dissenting justices argued that the order had “general applicability” as it prohibited all home gatherings of more than three families, not just religious gatherings. However, the majority opinion pointed out that the order failed to pass the “strict scrutiny” test, meaning that there was no evidence that an in-home religious gathering was more dangerous for COVID than gathering at a hair salon; and as religious liberty is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, any restrictive orders must pass the strict scrutiny test. Interestingly, the order was set to expire on April 15, yet the Supreme Court decided to [still issue a ruling](#) against the mandate because California officials “with a track record of moving the goalposts retain authority to reinstate those heightened restrictions at any time.”

Arkansas Governor Vetoes Bill to Protect Children from Transgender Procedures

On Monday, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson [vetoed](#) a bill passed by the state legislature that would have made it illegal for doctors to pursue transgender affirming medical interventions for minors. The bill, called the Arkansas Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act, would have prohibited gender transition procedures for children under age 18, with violators facing possible loss of their medical license. The bill [describes](#) the many negative health effects that hormone blockers, cross-sex hormones, and gender reassignment surgery have on children, including permanent and irreversible damage to otherwise healthy body parts and an increased chance of developing life-threatening illnesses. Governor Hutchinson, a Republican, [stated](#) that the bill was “a product of the cultural war in America” and claimed that the bill was “a vast government overreach” that would establish “new standards of legislative interference with physicians and parents as they deal with some of the most complex and sensitive matters involving young people.” In response, the Arkansas House and Senate voted by a simple majority to [override](#) Governor Hutchinson’s veto, passing the bill into law without his approval. Interestingly, in March, Governor Hutchinson signed a version of a Save Girls’ Sports bill, which ensures that students must participate in sports teams that align with their biological sex. The pressure Republican governors such as Hutchinson and Kristi Noem (ND) are facing over these biological sex bills shows the power of LGBT lobbying interests in advancing transgender rights in the states.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[New AACS Podcast Discussing Emergency Assistance to Non-Publics Schools in COVID Relief Bill](#)

[AACS Podcast: Protecting Religious Liberty](#)