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*“The future of this nation depends on the Christian training of our youth.”*  
*George Washington*

**AACS Hosts Annual Youth Legislative Training Conference**

The AACCS hosted its annual [Youth Legislative Training Conference](#) (YLTC) last week, welcoming 32 high school students from 21 states to Washington, D.C., to learn about politics from a biblical perspective and sharpen their leadership skills. Conference highlights included a mock senate, a congressional briefing in the U.S. Capitol, meetings with congressional offices, insights from top conservative leaders, and tours of some of our nation’s historic sites. During the mock senate, students role-played current senators and participated in one of four committees. Under the instruction of Mrs. Gail Nicholas, a 5-Diamond coach in the National Speech and Debate Association, the students crafted legislation, led committee meetings, and debated and voted on their bills. The mock senate helped the students gain respect for our government, an understanding of Senate procedure, and the confidence to engage in the political process.

The week included a “Day on the Hill” where students were privileged to attend a special congressional briefing in the U.S. Capitol and hear from prominent Hill staffers who share Christian values and are working to protect the cause of freedom. These speakers included Ted Ellis, Coalitions and Member Services Director for the House Republican Study Committee; Noah Jackson, a legislative clerk for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce; Jim Neill, the Senior Policy Advisor for Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell; Dr. Charmaine Yoest, the Executive Director of the House Values Action Team; and Rachel Bovard, the Executive Director of the Senate Steering Committee. At the close of each presentation, a student had the opportunity to pray for these leaders who are in key staffing positions on Capitol Hill. The students also heard from Tim Goeglein, Vice President of External and Government Relations for Focus on the Family, who emphasized the importance of Christianity in preserving our freedom. Additional speakers included Leadership Institute personnel, including Ryan Brann, Director of Communications Training, and Dena Espenscheid, Senior Director of Coalitions. A highlight of the week was our “YLTC Alumni Panel,” which featured D.C. professionals Luke Ball, Peter Holland, and Nicole White, who participated in the YLTC during their high school and college years. They challenged students to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way and spoke about the role of faith in making a difference in the political world.

Other highlights of the week included watching the Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Iwo Jima Memorial and touring the Library of Congress. The students also enjoyed an evening monument tour which featured the Lincoln, Jefferson, Vietnam War, Korean War, and WWII memorials, and the Washington Monument. The week culminated with a visit to Arlington National Cemetery where four exemplary YLTC students were awarded the honor of representing AACCS by laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We are grateful for an incredible week and pray for God’s blessing and guidance for the students. The AACCS is grateful for the volunteers, donors, and chaperones who made this year’s YLTC a success. For pictures of the week, please visit our [Facebook page](#) (@AACCSeducates) or our [YLTC Instagram account](#) (@yltc\_aacs).

## Supreme Court Protects Religious Liberty

The U.S. Supreme Court issued two decisions last week that uphold religious liberty protections for all persons. The first case, [303 Creative LLC v. Elenis](#), involved Lori Smith, who owns and operates her own website designing business. When she decided to expand her business to include designing wedding websites, she recognized that Colorado’s anti-discrimination law could be used to punish creative designers, as was [cake designer Jack Phillips](#), who had declined to design cakes celebrating events contrary to his moral conscience. Lori Smith filed a lawsuit, requesting an injunction from the court that would prevent the state of Colorado from forcing her to design websites that violated her religious beliefs. The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the First Amendment protects her from being forced to use her creative talents in a way that goes against her religious beliefs. Justice Neil Gorsuch [wrote in the majority opinion](#) that the state cannot “force an individual to speak in ways that align with its [government] views but defy her conscience about a matter of major significance.” Alliance Defending Freedom president Kristen Waggoner recognized the importance of the court’s decision, [stating](#), “The First Amendment envisions the United States as a rich and complex place where all persons are free to speak and to think as they wish, not as the government demands.” She added that the decision “upholds a fundamental right to say what you believe without fear of government punishment, and that’s a win for all of us.”

In the second case, [Groff v. DeJoy](#), the Supreme Court unanimously upheld an employee’s right to a religious accommodation in the workplace, as long as granting the accommodation does not create undue hardship for the company. The case involved Gerald Groff who filed suit against the United States Postal Service (USPS) after being required to work on Sundays, despite his request to have Sundays off for religious reasons. The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals previously ruled that providing a religious accommodation would place undue hardship on the USPS, basing the decision on a 1977 case, *Trans World Airlines, Inc. v. Hardison*, which stated that undue hardship for a company meant anything that brought “de minimis” cost to the company. However, the Supreme Court [clarified the interpretation](#) of undue hardship, stating that “undue” means “excessive” or “unjustifiable,” and “hardship” is “more severe than a mere burden”; therefore, an undue hardship would be “very different from a burden that is merely more than de minimis, i.e., something that is very small or trifling.” The case has been sent back to the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals for further consideration based on this clarification. Kelley Shackelford, president of First Liberty Institute which represented Groff, [praised](#) the Court’s decision, stating that it “restores religious freedom to every American in the workplace. This decision will positively help million and millions of Americans—those who work now and their children and grandchildren.”

### In Case You Missed It:

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

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

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[Celebrating the First Anniversary of Post-Roe America](#)

[Celebrating Independence Day and America’s Founding](#)

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