

Appointments and Actions Churn Toward School Choice and Charters, Limited Government, and Increased Religious Liberty

While President Trump has received ample criticism for a number of things, including having a chaotic start-up to his administration, it is clear that in education he is aligning actions and appointments toward his goals of providing more choice and charters, limiting the size of government, and providing for more religious liberty.

Justice Gorsuch to Hear Christian School Funding Case - The filibuster shattering Senate confirmation of Neil Gorsuch and his swearing in on April 10 will have a huge impact on schools for many years to come. The first case the new Justice is likely to hear will be *Trinity Lutheran Church v. Pauley*. This case will have ramifications for the Trump administration's "school choice" push. Arguments are set for April 19 in this case that challenges the reach of the so-called "Blaine Amendments." These amendments, present in many state constitutions, prohibit public money from going to religious institutions, including Christian schools. The issue at stake is whether it is constitutional for the Blaine Amendments to prohibit government subsidies for non-religious aspects of a church program, in this case providing scrap tire rubber to cover the playground. [SCOTUS Blog](#) - noted that the court may have delayed scheduling this case, waiting for a ninth justice to avoid a 4-4 split of the court. The First Amendment Center sponsored a very informative mock hearing of the case which you can [view online](#). The mock hearing showcased likely arguments, questions, and responses. Many conservatives will be watching how Gorsuch votes on this case to see if he remains the strong advocate for religious liberty that he has been on lower court cases.

Trump's Budget Proposal Cuts Many Domestic Programs – Including Education - The traditional education establishment has been in a tizzy over the proposed budget outline proposed by the Trump administration. The budget proposes [significant cuts](#) of about 13% or \$9 billion in the federal government's \$64 billion budget for K-12 schools. The budget increases spending for school choice by \$1.4 billion. The cuts include the complete elimination of the [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) program that supports summer and after-school programs, and the [Title II](#) program that provides school districts with teacher improvement grants. Traditionally the President's budget proposal is only viewed as a starting point for the Congress so there is a chance that these cuts will be moderated. However, it is likely that the final budget will cut domestic programs including federal education programs while defense spending increases.

Two Attorneys Picked for DE - President Trump – certainly in consultation with Education Secretary Betsy DeVos – [announced](#) the nomination of Carlos Muñoz to serve as the General Legal Counsel for the Department of Education. Muñoz served as the deputy attorney general and chief of staff to Florida's attorney general, Pam Bondi, and chief legal counsel to former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Also, the Department of Education hired Candice E. Jackson, an attorney from Vancouver, Wash., to serve as Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. Jackson received [notoriety](#) for writing, "*Their Lives: Women Targeted by the Clinton Machine*," which

documented President Bill Clinton's checkered history with women. She also helped the Trump Campaign organize a panel of these women to speak out against Hillary Clinton. The Muñiz position will require Senate confirmation which could prove to be dicey given Senate Democrats' delays in confirming Betsy DeVos.

Jackson will not require Senate confirmation as long as she remains Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. Her role is important because the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) promulgates and enforces regulations that have a huge impact on school districts. Most recently OCR worked on the controversial "Dear Colleague" letter on transgender use of school restrooms that was recently rescinded by Secretary DeVos. Reining in the OCR from promulgating regulations that profoundly alter our culture is a major step toward allowing the American culture to be shaped by the public rather than a handful of federal employees.

Secretary DeVos' s School Visits Highlight School Choice Programs - A Department of Defense School at Fort Bragg North Carolina received a visit from Secretary DeVos last week. Not surprisingly she used the visit as an opportunity to promote Senator Tim Scott's (R – SC) [CHOICE Act](#) which would establish a pilot school choice program for military families, provide startup and expansion funding to states that offer school choice for students with disabilities and expand the Washington DC opportunities scholarship program. This was followed by [additional school visits](#) to charter schools in Miami and Washington, DC. Star power was enlisted for these visits including First Lady Melania Trump and Queen Rania of Jordan. The SLAM Academy DeVos visited in Miami has been strongly supported by the rapper Pitbull.

Prayers for Our Nation -

While Congress is taking their spring break it is a great time to pray for them, that they will return refreshed and in the right frame of mind to serve God well, and that the policies they promote will be a blessing to our nation's children.

Charles Garriott, author of, "Prayers for Trump – Petitions for the 45th President," [recommends](#) that this month we pray for the strength to be faithful in prayer for the President:

In your Word you remind us about the importance of prayer. "The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him" (Proverbs 15:8). May our hearts be right before you. In this we need the help of our Redeemer, Christ. We pray that you would increase our desire to pray for President Trump. Help us to be gracious, persistent and specific in our prayers. Help us to take before your throne of grace his family, his wife Melania and his children, Donald, Ivanka, Eric, Tiffany, Barron and his grandchildren. Help us to pray for his administration. May we be faithful in this calling that you have placed upon our lives. The peace, prosperity and integrity of our nation depend upon your goodness. We ask now for your help in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

And, with Justice Gorsuch taking his seat on the Supreme Court, these petitions for judges from “*Method for Prayer*” by Matthew Henry might serve as a useful prompt for your prayers:

Make those who rule over us just, ruling in the fear of God; and let those who judge remember that they judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with them in giving judgment, that therefore the fear of the Lord may be upon them

Make them able men and trustworthy, men who fear God and hate a bribe, that justice may run down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Enable our magistrates to defend the weak and fatherless, to maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute, to rescue the weak and the needy; to deliver them from the hand of the wicked; and let governors never be a terror to good works, but the evil.

CEAI is interested in your thoughts on the ideas expressed here. Members can express their thoughts on education and faith by entering comments below. Personal comments may be addressed to the author at JMitchell@ceai.org. John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.

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