

NEW Council Member Goes to Washington, DC

By Deborah Hughes, Early Childhood Learning Center/Preschool Representative

I am not an active political person. I do vote in elections, but I have never contacted my Congressman to discuss an issue. That changed last week as I found myself in Washington, D.C. at the request of ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International). Annually, ACSI does a Legal Legislative Conference in Washington. They ask Christian school leadership to come and receive training, and then the next day speak to their Congressional representatives.

It was an eye-opening trip because I met so many believers in Jesus Christ who work in Washington, D.C. For me, there were two who stood out. Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-Missouri) had an amazing story of how God placed her in Congress. She is not apologetic about her belief in Jesus and openly quotes scripture. She wrote a book, *Running God's Way*. The book, through scripture, reveals campaign techniques which helped her succeed on Election Day. The other person was Paul S. Teller, Ph.D. who is the Special Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs. Previously he was the Chief of Staff to Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). No matter what you think of President Trump, Teller said he never dreamed he would be on the Trump team. He said President Trump has built a very collaborative team, reaching out to many staffers of the final primary runners. Teller's current role at the White House positions him as liaison to Congressional conservatives and outside groups. It was an honor to listen to him while at the White House.

So why were we there? ACSI wanted us to be able to speak to congressman about school choice and how we can still keep our religious rights. In May, 2011, all eyes of the nation concerned with educational vouchers, were on Indiana to see what would happen when the strongest school choice law went into effect. This meant my state, Indiana, was the first state to give low-income parents a choice of where they send their children for education. Because of this, Christian schools, in Indiana have grown at a rapid rate. Parents who thought they would never be able to afford Christian schooling are now able to send their children to a Christian school.

School choice can be a very complicated issue, like most issues in our country. A major concern regarding school choice and vouchers: Are there "strings attached"? I can speak to my experience. Two and a half years ago the State of Indiana approached my school. Because we are accredited and have the highest rating in our rating system, they wanted our school to take vouchers for the "On My Way Pre-K program". Last year alone, Indiana spent 24 million dollars on children who "flunked" kindergarten. Because kindergarten is now like first grade, if you do not attend pre-k somewhere, it is very difficult to successfully navigate kindergarten. We had the privilege to prepare those children for kindergarten and still expose them to the gospel. Other than having a quality program, at this point, there are no strings attached.

This past Saturday, I was talking to one of these parents at our Upwards Soccer event. Several months ago, I had the awesome privilege to lead this mom to pray a forgiveness prayer. She told me, while watching the soccer game, that she is so thankful God brought our school into her life. Three weeks ago, a different voucher parent was in a very volatile relationship. The police were called, and the mom reached out to our children's pastor who also prayed a prayer of forgiveness

with her. If it had not been for school vouchers, neither of these situations would have happened. God is using school choice to spread the gospel.

So, we were in Washington, D.C. to ask representatives to please allow us to keep our religious freedoms AND let parents choose quality. It was a humbling experience that is causing me to prayerfully process what else God may have in mind for me next. Stay tuned to see where God leads.

Deborah Hughes has been the Director of Grace Point Church of the Nazarene's Kiddie Prep School for 28 years. The preschool is fully accredited with the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). She serves on the ACSI accreditation commission, the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee, and conducts accreditation visits. You may contact her at dhughes@gpnaz.org.