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Public Blesses Arizona Christian School Tuition

A sizable majority of the public say it's OK for states to give tax credits to parents who send their children to private schools with a religious affiliation. According to a national poll of registered voters by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, just one in four (26%) say that by giving the tax discounts the state is supporting religious schools, while three in five (60%) say such credits are supporting school choice.

The matter was debated this year before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*. At root the question was whether such tax credits for parents of kids enrolling in private, religiously-affiliated schools are a breach of the First Amendment's rule against the "establishment of religion."

The court's decision was announced today. The 5-to-4 ruling sidestepped the issue of establishment altogether by holding that the plaintiffs had no standing to bring suit. The majority ruled that precisely because it was "a tax credit as opposed to a governmental expenditure," those who brought the suit lacked legal authority to bring the case.

"Even though the Supreme Court declined to rule on the underlying, substantive issue in this case—whether the tax credits infringe upon constitutional protections—this issue is not going away," said [Bruce Peabody](#), professor of political science at FDU and editor of the book [The Politics of Judicial Independence](#). "The case brought out four dissents, a signal that those justices were prepared to decide the substantive issue. Just as important a different plaintiff with a more specific interest in the case will meet the Court's standing criteria."

Among various segments of the public, some important differences are also evident. Democrats are twice as likely as Republicans to conclude that tax credits amount to state support of religion. Three-quarters of Republicans (74%), on the other hand, say those tax credits are merely supporting school choice, while just 16% of Republicans object that the state aid is support for religious schools.

"In making this ruling on such narrow grounds, the court virtually guarantees that the plaintiffs in one guise or another will be back another day," said Peter Woolley, a political scientist and director of the poll.

The differences in the poll are not just of matter of party. Voters aged 30-44, the prime child-rearing years, are more likely than other age groups to say tax credits support parents' right to choose schools rather than supporting religious schools.

The university-based research center conducted a national poll focusing on four prominent cases considered this year by the country's highest court: *Schwarzenegger v. Entertainment Merchants*, *Schwarzenegger v. Plata*, *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, and *Alford v. Greene*.

The [Fairleigh Dickinson University](#) poll of 800 registered voters nationwide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from March 21, 2011, through March 28, 2011, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Mar. 21, 2011, through Mar. 28, 2011, using a randomly selected national sample of 800 registered voters. The margin of error for a sample of 800 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.5 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

This court case involves a state that allows a discount on taxes for parents who send their children to private schools, including schools with religious affiliations. Have you heard about this case?

	All
Yes	31%
No	69%

Some people argue that... ROTATE. Others argue that...ROTATE. Which comes closer to your view?
 ...so many parents send their kids to schools with a religious affiliation that the state is supporting religious schools.
 ...the state is not supporting religious schools, it is simply supporting the parents' right to choose schools...

Rotate order	All	Party ID				age				gender		education	
		D	I	R	18-29	30-44	45-60	60+	men	women	college<	>college	
Supporting religion	26%	32	28	16	39	17	29	28	23	29	24	37	
Supporting parents	60%	55	56	74	52	69	57	58	63	57	61	57	
Unsure	14%	13	16	11	9	15	14	13	13	14	15	6	

Question Wording and Order

Questions US1 through USP3E preceded this series and were released on March 30. Four questions were asked in this series.

Now let me ask you about some cases that the US Supreme Court is considering...

ROTATE ORDER OF CASES

[Schwarzenegger v. Entertainment Merchants]

SC1a. Recently, some states have passed laws that forbid the sale of violent video games to children under 18. How much have you heard or read about this issue...READ?

- a lot
- some
- just a little
- or nothing.
- [DK=nothing]

SC1b. Some people say... ROTATE. Others say...ROTATE Which comes closer to your view?

... states do not have the right to decide that some video games are too violent for people under 18, any more than they have the right to decide what literature or fairy tales are too violent for people under 18, and that these decisions must be left to parents.

...states have a right to regulate the sale of violent video games in order to protect people under 18, the same way they regulate the sale of cigarettes, alcohol, or pornography to protect people under 18.

DO NOT READ
Left to parents
Regulate
DK

[Schwarzenegger v. Plata]

SC2. This case involves a question of overcrowded prisons in one state...

Some people argue that... ROTATE. Others argue that...ROTATE. Which comes closer to your view?

...the prisons are so over-crowded, and the health conditions so poor, that some prisoners have to be let go.

... even though conditions are bad, the court cannot order criminals to be released.

DO NOT READ
Release
Can't release
DK

[Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn]

SC3A. This court case involves a state that allows a discount on taxes for parents who send their children to private schools, including schools with religious affiliations.

Have you heard about this case?

Yes
No
DK

SC3b. Some people argue that... ROTATE. Others argue that...ROTATE. Which comes closer to your view?

...so many parents send their kids to schools with a religious affiliation that the state is supporting religious schools.

...the state is not supporting religious schools, it is simply supporting the parents' right to choose schools...

DO NOT READ
It is supporting religious schools
It is supporting parents' right to choose.
DK

[Alford v. Greene]

SC4. This case is about a girl who was interrogated at school for two hours by state authorities without her parents' knowledge.

Have you heard about this case?

- Yes
- No
- DK

Some people argue that... ROTATE. Others argue that...ROTATE. Which comes closer to your view?

...she had to be interrogated without her parents' knowledge because the questioning was about possible abuse at home.

...authorities must inform the parents before they interrogate a child, unless there is a court order or an immediate danger.

- Interrogate
- Inform parents
- DK

Sample Characteristics

Gender	
Male	50
Female	50

Party ID	
Democrat	31
Ind. Lean Dem.	12
Independent	15
Ind. Lean Rep.	14
Republican	23
Other/ref.	4

Age	
18-29	12
30-44	25
45-59	30
60+	30
ref.	2

In addition to being American, would you say you are...?	
White	68
Black	13
Hispanic or Latino	9
Asian	4
Other/ref.	5

Census regions	
Northeast	21
North central	24
South	34
West	20

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