



Commissioner's

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Kentucky Commissioner of Education

Comments

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Dr. Pruitt goes to Washington

I am a huge fan of Jimmy Stewart – always have been and always will be. One of his movies that I've always loved is "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

In the movie, Stewart's character, Mr. Jefferson Smith, is appointed by his governor to fill a vacant position in the Senate. He is very excited, and likewise very naïve. He arrives in D.C. from his small rural town with some big ideas that he quickly learns are not easily done in this huge political machine that is Washington, D.C. His first legislation was to set up a camp for underprivileged boys near his hometown – a laudable effort, but one on which he would face an uphill battle. He quickly discovers that even his appointment was the result of politics – so that powerful people could get their way on policy. Mr. Smith was told he was alone in his efforts on the camp, it was impossible and to just let it go. Well, he didn't let it go, and with his friends and colleagues he made a difference for his home state.

Well, I went to Washington last week to try to make a difference for my home state of Kentucky.

No one sets a goal in life that they want to testify in front of a Congressional committee. I am not sure many would even find excitement in it. Admittedly, I did not want to be put into a position to testify, but sometimes you simply have to stand up for what's right. I felt very much like Mr. Smith in many ways.

When Congress passed the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) and the President signed it into law, I embraced its promise. I embraced with gusto the idea that states can make decisions that best fit the values of their own education shareholders. I may be naïve, but I believe the only way we can move to our next step of ensuring every student gets a quality education is to think about quality and not compliance. Yet, that is not where subsequent conversations have led and I am not comfortable with the federal demands being placed on our state.

Like Mr. Smith, I felt I committed to doing right by our districts, our schools, but most importantly our students and educators. I had to speak up and I ask you to do so as well. Here is a link to my [oral testimony](#) and the more detailed [written testimony](#) for your review and knowledge.

My ask is that, within the next month, each of you submit feedback on the proposed ESSA regulations. The [proposed ESSA regulations](#) are open for feedback **until August 1**. You may read them and submit comments through this website: <http://1.usa.gov/282OmYh>.

We can make this the right thing for Kentucky, but only if WE take it upon ourselves to advocate – to stand for our children and our state – just as Mr. Smith did, even when we feel inadequate to challenge or change the establishment. As long as we work for students, we are more than adequate.

So, please let the United States Department of Education know that in Kentucky, we understand the need for compliance, but value quality education for all of our children over all else.

Oh, and welcome to Washington.