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“Religion is of general and public concern, and on its support depend, in great measure, the peace and good order of government, the safety and happiness of the people. By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed upon the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protections in their religious liberty.”

Supreme Court of Maryland, 1799

Common Core State Standards Released

This week the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the final draft of the [Common Core State Standards](#), a “set of state-led education standards” which were developed by a “variety of stakeholders including content experts, states, teachers, school administrators and parents.” The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) was designed to develop a set of K-12 standards which establish “clear and consistent goals for learning that will prepare America’s children for success in college and work.”

While 48 states had originally signed onto the initiative in order to be involved in the process (Texas and Alaska opted not to be a part of the discussion for fear of federal intrusion), only time will tell how many states will actually adopt the common core standards. Many states have become increasingly [wary of the initiative](#) as the Obama Administration has made numerous attempts to incentivize state adoption of the standards. In fact, in order to receive Race to the Top funds, the Administration’s most dramatic program for education reform, a state must have adopted the common core standards or other standards that meet college readiness in that state. While supporters of the initiative continue to claim that the common core standards have been completely state-led and have received zero involvement from the federal government, questions remain over the Administration’s coercion of states to adopt the standards.

In a panel hosted at the Cato Institute, Sandra Boyd, Vice-President of Strategic Communications and Outreach for the organization Achieve, reiterated her support for what she defined as a completely “state-led” initiative. She further expressed that standards are not enough to reform the education system and urged a common curriculum to be adopted in order to meet the high standards. Michael Petrilli, Vice-President for National Programs & Policy for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, also voiced his support for the adoption of the standards in order to create a more unified education system. He sought to answer the numerous concerns associated with the initiative by expressing the “voluntary” opt-out aspect of the standards. Neal McCluskey, Associate Director of the Center for Educational Freedom for the Cato Institute, along with Lindsey Burke, Policy Analyst at the Heritage Foundation, opposed the idea of national standards citing reasons of [insignificant](#) empirical evidence and data along with increased centralization of power over the educational system, which would in turn create a “[misalignment](#) of power and incentives.”

States have until the end of this year to [decide](#) whether or not to adopt the standards. Some states are opting to sit out this time around to see how the initiative will play out. Others states believe the [cost](#) to adopt the

standards would place too heavy of a burden on the state and will most likely opt out. Whether or not the states choose to join in on the state-led initiative, one thing is clear—states do not want to be forced into adopting a set of common standards in order to compete for federal funds.

A New Way to Learn

Experts and policymakers on Capitol Hill are just beginning to explore the use of virtual education in schools across America. In a forum held by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank on Capitol Hill, policymakers, experts, and educators discussed the importance of [shifting](#) America's education from a "factory-model" system to a "more affordable, student-centric system for the 21st Century."

The forum panelists included Paul Peterson, Director, Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance, and author of *Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning*; Susan Patrick, President and Chief Executive Officer, International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL); Michael Horn, Co-founder and Executive Director, Education of Innosight Institute; and Adam Schaeffer, Policy Analyst, Center for Educational Freedom, Cato Institute.

All panelists were in agreement that virtual education can offer increased choice among parents, students, and educators, yet some concerns remained on how best to implement the concept into the current educational system. Adam Schaeffer of the Cato Institute raised concerns over how a virtual learning system would work with the government monopoly of the education system. He argued that virtual education would not be able to expand without the expansion of other private choice options such as tax credits. Consumer freedom and producer freedom drives the free market system; and in order to have the best quality education, choices must be a factor. While other panelists were more willing to offer virtual education in which the government would be the sole provider, Schaeffer urged for a market approach where private industries could create multiple online schooling options allowing for competition and the best quality education.

To watch the panel online, please click [here](#).

Arizona School Choice Reaches Supreme Court

The Supreme Court announced this last week that the highest court will hear arguments in the case that has [challenged](#) the constitutionality of a tax-credit program in the state of Arizona. Arizona's tax credit program serves nearly 29,000 students. It was the first tax-credit program in the country, which led to the adoption of similar school choice programs in other states. The program allows individual tax payers to receive up to \$500 in dollar-for-dollar tax credits if they choose to donate to a school tuition organization. The program is overwhelmingly popular in the state and benefits mostly special needs students and children of low-income families.

Last year, however, a lawsuit was brought before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who argued the program violated the establishment clause. According to the [Institute for Justice \(IJ\)](#), which argued on behalf of the program, "The case was filed 10 years ago by the ACLU, which claims that the tax credit program advances religion because taxpayers—free from any government pressure—have independently decided to give more money to religiously affiliated School Tuition Organizations than to nonreligious organizations. Arizonans are free to give to any of the 54 organizations currently operating in Arizona, including many that are nonreligious."

School choice advocates are [excited](#) that the Supreme Court has decided to hear the case. They are hoping the Court will reach a conclusion comparable to the 2002 school choice case *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* decision, which upheld a similar program in Ohio. While four new Justices will be sitting on the bench since the last school choice case was heard in 2002, many are hopeful the decision will be handed down in favor of allowing parents the choice and resources when choosing education for their child.

Obamanomics and the American Family

Last month Concerned Women for America (CWA), the nation's largest public policy organization for women, released, *Obamanomics: A Summary of the Analyses and Commentary Related to the Financial Impact of ObamaCare on Women and Families*. Dr. Janice Crouse, Senior Fellow of the Beverly LaHaye Institute, the think tank for CWA, conducted the research on the effect that the policies now being adopted by the Obama Administration will have on the family. The detailed analyses explores the concerns that many conservatives have expressed and gives sound evidence on what is to be expected in the years following implementation of these historical policies.

According to the Executive Summary of the report, Dr. Crouse defines "Obamanomics" as "the term given to those aspects of President Barack Obama's policies that affect the economic and fiscal well-being of the American public and the nation." Dr. Crouse expresses that the new health care law which was passed last March, as well as the stimulus package, the Cap and Trade bill, and "the possibility of a value-added tax (VAT) contribute to the concept of Obamanomics. All these policy initiatives — and the tax increases that will be necessary to finance them — are a threat to individual families' finances. She further believes they threaten "the nation's economic strength, contribute to the financial crisis, and vastly increase the federal debt that economists predict will add to the already existing mountain of debt that promises to burden generations of Americans into the foreseeable future."

Dr. Crouse explores the major impact that these policies will have on American families through the marriage penalties, government funded abortions, cuts in Medicare and Medicaid as well as new and increased taxes on families and small businesses. Graphs and charts complete the report and give a visual perception of the dangers of these policies. The sound research has provided many policymakers and families with the details and facts of the thousands of pages of policies recently passed by this Administration and Congress.

To read the full report, please click [here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[CA Passes Law to Counter Texas Textbooks](#)

[Attack on Marriage in Minnesota Draws Intervention Effort](#)