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*“Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure (and) which insures to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.”*  
- **Charles Carroll**, signer of the Declaration of Independence

**Supreme Court Decides to Delay Action for Same-Sex Marriage Cases**

This week, the U.S. Supreme Court Justices [decided](#) not to take up any of seven cases which have been appealed to the high court regarding same-sex marriage. Currently, thirty-one [states](#) have constitutional amendments or laws which define marriage as between one man and one woman. However, since the 2013 Supreme Court ruling which struck down part of the Defense of Marriage Act, there have been a significant number of court cases across the country challenging state laws and constitutional amendments which uphold traditional marriage and prohibit same-sex marriage. This past summer, the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, the 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals all ruled that state bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional in Virginia, Indiana, Wisconsin, Utah, and Oklahoma. These cases have since been appealed to the Supreme Court. Additional cases have been heard in the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court (for Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee) and the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court (for Idaho and Nevada), and decisions from these courts are pending. While the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit is expected to overturn the state constitutional marriage amendments in Idaho and Nevada, most court watchers agree that the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit will likely uphold the amendments and rule in favor of traditional marriage. The decisions on these cases will likely be appealed to the Supreme Court as well, regardless of their ruling. Some pundits say the Supreme Court is waiting on a decision from an appeals court that contradicts what the other courts have ruled, and this will likely come from the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit. The Supreme Court can still decide to take up one or all of these cases during this current term, and that will likely be considered a landmark decision on the issue of same-sex marriage in this country. While supporters of same-sex marriage claim this is an issue of equality, those who oppose same-sex marriage [point out](#) that this issue has serious ramifications for religious liberty. If the law dictates that same-sex marriage is legal, there will then be demands that it be accepted and approved, despite one's religious tenets that may teach otherwise, causing harm to individual religious rights as well as the religious liberty of institutions, businesses, and churches.

**Common Core Testing is Big Business**

Education, traditionally seen as a parental responsibility carried out on the local and state level, is experiencing a paradigm shift of national proportions with huge implications on the educational marketplace. Americans have come to see education as a social and civic necessity driven by goodwill and a desire to see children healthy and growing to their potential; however, it is impossible to consider education outside of the economic realities presented in the task of teaching children. One only has to observe the economic implications of paying teachers, building schools, printing textbooks, and creating instructional tools to see that education is a huge marketplace with billions of dollars spent each year. When educational decision making moves away from state and local control and toward a more centralized, top-down system, it drives the market toward big business. This trend can be most clearly seen in the 300 million dollars already spent to create standardized

tests for states using the Common Core. The majority of these funds have been assigned through two large testing consortia ([PARCC](#) and [Smarter Balance](#)) and have been awarded to only a few large testing companies. A recent [Education Week article](#) highlights the issue. In the article, Gregory J. Cizek, a professor of educational measurement and evaluation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, illustrates the shift by considering the different types of markets that exist between building houses versus building skyscrapers. Obviously, smaller local housing markets allow for many more choices among small business type companies, while building skyscrapers is market dominated by large elite firms without very much competition. Common sense and economic realities dictate that as Common Core drives the nation's educational marketplace toward large-scale solutions, fewer providers will dominate the educational marketplace. Some of the questions to be answered seem to be, "Who will these elite builders of our children's minds be?" and "What will their motivations for our children's education truly be?" The answers to these questions are crucial to anyone who cares about education in America and our children's future.

### **Values Voters Summit Attracts Large Crowd in Nation's Capital**

Last week, the annual Values Voters Summit attracted over 2,000 conservatives in Washington, D.C. Hosted by the Family Research Council, the summit included a host of high-profile conservative [speakers](#) who spoke to the importance of protecting our religious liberty, right to life, and traditional marriage, as well as keeping a conservative approach to our economy, educational system, health care system, and national defense program. The summit culminated with the Faith, Family and Freedom Gala in which Meriam Ibrahim was honored with the "Cost of Discipleship" award for her faith and courage while enduring months in a Sudanese prison when sentenced to death for her faith in Christ. Delivering her keynote speech, she praised the Lord for her freedom, stating, "God is good, all the time." Sen. Ted Cruz won a Presidential [straw poll](#), with Ben Carson placing second and former Gov. Mike Huckabee coming in third. The poll also asked attendees which issues were most important to them, and 39% indicated "protecting religious liberty" was at the top, with abortion and "protecting natural marriage" closely following. Sen. Ted Cruz inspired attendees by [saying](#), "There are people in Washington who say that in order to win we have to abandon our values. Our values are who we are. Our values are why we are here." To view speeches by key speakers, click [here](#).

### **Innovation in School Choice Through Education Savings Accounts**

A relatively new school choice program is gaining momentum as participating families in Arizona are seeing positive [results](#) through Education Savings Accounts (ESA). The concept of an ESA is simple—the state deposits money into a private account that eligible parents can access and use to meet their child's educational needs, whether it be a private school, home school, or another educational option. If funds are left in a child's account at the end of the school year, parents do not have to return the money to the state but can put it towards the child's college fund. Participating parents have found that an ESA has afforded them greater flexibility and freedom than vouchers as they are not limited to what school or educational option they must follow but rather can choose the best instruction and method that meets the needs of their child. The concept of an ESA was first developed by the Goldwater Institute in 2005, and Arizona was the first to implement an ESA program through legislation in 2011. Other states are seeing the benefit and beginning to implement similar programs. Florida passed an ESA law last summer, and ESA legislation is being considered in Mississippi, Oregon, Oklahoma, Iowa, Montana, Utah, and Missouri.

### **In Case You Missed It:**

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

[How We Can Turn the Tide in the Culture Wars](#)

[GA School Choice Tax Credit Program Headed to Court](#)

Jamison Coppola: Legislative Director

Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst

Legislative Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003

Phone: 202.547.2991

Fax: 202.547.2992