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“Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote that he is not making a present or a compliment to please an individual—or at least that he ought not so to do; but that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.”

Samuel Adams

WV House Votes to Repeal Common Core

The West Virginia House of Delegates passed a bill (HB 4014) last week that would [repeal the Common Core Standards](#) (CCS)—and any standards based on the CCS—and require replacement standards to be implemented by the 2017-2018 school year. Last year, the WV State Board of Education voted to replace the CCS with College- and Career-Ready Standards, yet these were criticized for being too closely aligned with the CCS. In addition to repealing the standards, the bill also requires the state to withdraw from the Common Core-aligned assessment, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and allows parents to opt-out of testing without any repercussions. Before the vote on the House floor, an amendment was added requiring the appointment of a four-member committee to evaluate and compare the West Virginia College- and Career-Ready Standards to other states’ standards that have a proven record of academic success and achievement. An additional amendment tackled the political issue of global warming by prohibiting the implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards which require students to defend the causes of global warming and explain how to stop it. House Delegate Jim Butler, who supported the amendment, explained, “In an energy producing state, we are teaching our kids we are doing immoral things here in order to make a living in our state. . . . [We need to] make sure science standards are teaching science and not pushing a political agenda.” The bill now heads to the state senate, after passing the house by a wide margin of 73-20.

Federal Court Rules Against Religious Liberty

The 11th Circuit Court last week ruled that a Catholic news organization must comply with the Obamacare mandate to include contraception and abortion-inducing drugs in its healthcare coverage or face steep fines. The Eternal World Television Network (EWTN) sought protection under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a law which prohibits the government from violating the religious liberty of any individual or organization without demonstrating that there is a substantial burden which requires such action. Currently, 21 states have RFRA laws in place. In the court ruling, the 11th Circuit [acknowledged](#) that the requirements imposed by the mandate caused EWTN to violate its beliefs: “We accept that the plaintiffs truly believe that triggering contraceptive coverage or being complicit in a system providing contraceptive coverage violates their religious beliefs.” However, the court added, “But our objective inquiry leads us to conclude that the government has not put plaintiffs to the choice of violating their religious beliefs or facing a significant penalty. We hold there is no substantial burden.” EWTN is being represented by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, and senior counsel Lori Windham reacted to the ruling by [stating](#): “This is wrong. Rather than provide these drugs and devices through its own exchanges, our government wants to punish EWTN for practicing its faith. This 2-1 decision is not the end. The government’s unconstitutional mandate has lost repeatedly at the Supreme Court, and we believe it will lose again.”

School Board Votes to Protect Students

Last week in Florida, the Brevard County school board unanimously [voted down](#) a measure that would have added gender identity and sexual orientation language to the district's anti-discrimination and employment policies. In response to a single teacher who demanded the measure, hundreds of parents, pastors, and teachers attended the council meeting to protest. In the meeting, which lasted over five hours, more than 90 people spoke out against the measure, listing the problems and dangers that would be created should LGBT students be granted access to all bathrooms and locker rooms regardless of their biological sex. They further explained that these new LGBT "rights" could result in "reverse discrimination of Christian children." Under the threat of a mass exodus of students from the schools, the school board unanimously voted the measure down. One parent stated, "The majority is speaking tonight. . . . We are saying we want God's word in our public schools. . . . We want godly principles in our public schools. We want Jesus Christ back in our schools."

Supreme Court Hears Arguments in Pro-Life Case

This week, the Supreme Court heard [oral arguments](#) in *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, the case over the Texas law which requires that any center performing abortions meet certain medical requirements. Specifically, the law requires that an abortion facility must meet the same health and safety requirements for ambulatory surgical centers, and doctors performing abortions must have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of the abortion facility. The law was passed in 2013 and then immediately challenged by abortion clinics, charging the law will hurt women and is not medically necessary, despite the fact that even the National Abortion Federation suggests abortion doctors have admitting privileges at a hospital within 20 miles (a distance shorter than that required by the new law). Since the law passed, more than half of the state's abortion clinics have already closed. With the absence of Justice Scalia on the High Court, the justices seem divided on the issue with the swing vote likely to be from Justice Anthony Kennedy.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[FRC Action Presidential Voter Guide](#)

[Can There Be "Compromise" Between Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity Non-Discrimination Laws and Religious Liberty Protections?](#)

[Investigating Planned Parenthood and Research Using Aborted Babies](#)

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