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"To a few of us here today this is a solemn and most momentous occasion, and yet in the history of our nation it is a commonplace occurrence. The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the Constitution routinely takes place, as it has for almost two centuries, and few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every 4-year ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle."

Ronald Reagan, first Inaugural address, January, 20, 1981

Senate HELP Committee Holds Confirmation Hearing for Betsy DeVos

On Tuesday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee held the confirmation hearing for Betsy DeVos, President-elect Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education. In her [opening statement](#), DeVos emphasized her passion and commitment to helping children succeed by working to empower parents to choose the best educational options: "I share President-elect Trump's view that it's time to shift the debate from what the system thinks is best for kids to what moms and dads want, expect and deserve. Parents no longer believe that a one-size-fits-all model of learning meets the needs of every child, and they know other options exist, whether magnet, virtual, charter, home, religious, or any combination thereof. Yet, too many parents are denied access to the full range of options....Why, in 2017, are we still questioning parents' ability to exercise educational choice for their children? I am a firm believer that parents should be empowered to choose the learning environment that's best for their individual children." While Republicans applauded her long history of supporting educational reform and school choice efforts, Democrats seemed focused on whether she would protect public school funding and educational programs, and whether her wealth and political contributions would create a conflict of interest for her. Chairman Lamar Alexander (TN) praised Mrs. DeVos for "being on the side of our children" and noted her efforts to help lower income parents gain more choices, her support for charter schools, and her generosity of using her wealth to advance choice options and programs for parents and students. Regarding her outspoken support for school choice, he stated, "I believe she is in the mainstream of public opinion, and her critics are not." Other questions that were posed during the hearing addressed the issues of student loans, preschool, free college, IDEA provisions, and the controversial Title IX Guidance issued by the Obama Administration. Mrs. DeVos repeatedly expressed her goal to put children first when reviewing these issues and directing policies, should she be confirmed as Secretary of Education. The committee appeared sharply divided between support or opposition based exclusively on partisan lines. Her nomination has sparked a new [nationwide discussion](#) on school choice opportunities, with supporters of choice praising the benefits to children and families. Those opposing school choice and the appointment of Betsy DeVos include teachers unions and public school proponents who charge that school choice will result in the privatization of public schools and create mediocre academics for children—claims based on false or misleading facts. The Trump Administration will undoubtedly offer new opportunities to discuss the strengths of school choice and create more opportunities for educational diversity and educational freedom.

New Poll Shows Strong Support for School Choice

The American Federation for Children just [released](#) its latest findings on the popularity of school choice from a poll conducted by Democratic polling firm Beck Research. The new poll results continue to display the ever-

growing support for school choice nationwide. The 1,100 likely voters who participated in the poll were asked, “Generally speaking, would you say you favor or oppose the concept of school choice? School choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars associated with their child’s education to send their child to the public or private school which better serves their needs.” The results found that nearly 70 percent of those polled support the idea of more school choice, while just 28 percent oppose the notion. Kevin P. Chavous, board member of the American Federation for Children, states, “The results of this poll demonstrate that the public is ready to change the education status quo and allow children and families to customize their education to meet their unique learning needs” The full polling results can be found [here](#). Poll results have been released on the eve of [National School Choice Week](#), which takes place next week, January 22–28. The week will offer an opportunity for schools, organizations, and individuals to highlight the benefits of choice programs to students and families. This year, over 21,000 events are scheduled to take place nationwide to celebrate the educational successes that have been achieved as a result of school choice programs.

Religious Freedom Day

Monday, January 16, marked [National Religious Freedom Day](#), an annual commemoration of the passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the 1778 state law that served as the model for the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In 1991, Congress officially recognized January 16 as National Religious Freedom Day, and [each president](#) since then has issued an annual proclamation encouraging Americans to commemorate the day through appropriate activities and events that teach the importance of protecting and preserving religious liberty. This year, Senator Daines (MT) introduced a resolution to mark the 231st anniversary of the Virginia statute. He [stated](#), “Religious Freedom Day reminds the American people that we are free to live and work in accordance with our religious beliefs, without fear of government retribution. Since its founding, our country has been an example for the world for freedom to teach, practice, worship and observe in accordance to one’s belief. Today we celebrate our right to a free society.” Written by Thomas Jefferson, the [statute](#) recognizes that “Almighty God hath created the mind free,” and that attempts to control a person’s belief violate natural, God-given rights. The statute further declares that “no man shall be compelled” to worship in any way, nor should any man “suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief.” The statute also offers a strong warning that any efforts to overturn the law “would be an infringement of natural right.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Don’t Miss the March for Life – next Friday, January 27](#)

[Tony Perkins: What President Trump Can Do About Religious Freedom](#)

[James Dobson: Trump’s Promises About the Supreme Court](#)

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