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*“Men who see not God in our history have surely lost sight of the fact that, from the landing of the Mayflower to this hour, the great men whose names are indissolubly associated with the colonization, rise, and progress of the Republic have borne testimony to the vital truths of Christianity.”*

*Andrew Johnson*

**School Safety Commission Conducts Meeting**

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos hosted a recent [meeting](#) at the U.S. Department of Education to discuss school safety policies and procedures. The informal meeting included testimonies from families who lost loved ones in the school shootings at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Parkland, as well as [reports](#) from experts in the fields of law enforcement and school safety threat assessment and procedures. The panel of experts included Troy Eid, who contributed to the Columbine Review Commission; Michael Mulhare, who serves as assistant vice-president for emergency management at Virginia Tech; Dr. Marissa Reddy Randazzo, who works as the Director of Threat Assessment for Georgetown University; and Bill Modzeleski, who has worked with several groups in threat assessment and school safety. A general consensus among the presenters and family members who spoke was that more emphasis must be made on prevention and threat assessment through studying behavior. Secretary DeVos was very interested in hearing the speakers’ suggestions as to what guidelines or policies the federal government should adopt or implement in order to stop the violence. Responses included a call for studies that analyze those cases where shootings and violence were prevented or stopped (often studies focus only on the incidents that take place) and also the need to criminalize threats of violence. Family members of victims suggested that arming school personnel and focusing on social and emotional learning were imperative to ensuring safe schools. This meeting was part of the efforts of the Federal Commission on School Safety, a group chaired by Secretary DeVos and charged with identifying ways that work to prevent violence at schools. At a recent Congressional hearing, DeVos indicated that the Commission is striving to have a report of best practices available by the end of the year, providing a resource that states and localities can use as they work to strengthen security in their schools. Secretary DeVos [noted](#), “In order to move forward, we must take a hard look back. We convened this meeting of experts and survivors to help give us a clear-eyed look at what has gone wrong in the past, the lessons learned, and areas where we continue to fall short as we work to keep our nation’s students and teachers safe at school. It’s imperative that we as a nation join together to ensure every student attends school in a safe and nurturing learning environment, and this meeting will lay the foundation for the critical work that lies ahead.” The Secretary also encouraged those from other organizations with ideas, comments, and solutions that work to email their ideas to [safety@ed.gov](mailto:safety@ed.gov).

## **Iowa Expands School Choice**

On the last day of their legislative session, Iowa lawmakers [approved two measures](#) in their tax reform bill which will increase school choice options. The bill expands the requirements for the state's tax credit program so that more families will be eligible to receive scholarships. The program functions by allowing tax credits for donations to a [School Tuition Organization](#) that in turn provides scholarships for qualifying families to send their children to the school of their choice. The measure included in the tax reform bill raises the cap for the program from \$12 million to \$13 million and also expands the eligibility requirements so that families making 400 percent of the federal poverty line are able to participate. The tax reform bill also includes necessary reforms to the state's program for 529 plans, [College Savings Iowa](#), so that it mirrors the changes made on the federal level by the Tax Cut and Jobs Act passed by Congress. These 529 savings plans were originally established to encourage savings for higher educational expenses, but last December Congress expanded the program to include K-12 educational expenses as well. Specific guidelines vary from state to state, so the inclusion of this measure in Iowa's recent bill ensures that families are now able to take advantage of this option to help pay for tuition at the K-12 school of their choice.

## **Courts Side with Transgender Students**

This past week, two major cases were decided which affirmed transgender students' right to use their preferred bathroom in public schools. In Virginia, the 3rd Circuit Court denied Gloucester County School Board's motion to dismiss the case of transgender teen Gavin Grimm, who claimed a right to use the boy's restroom. [Arenda Allen](#), a judge in the case, stated in arguments that "transgender is immutable" and claimed Gavin was protected by Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause in the Constitution. In Pennsylvania, the 4th Circuit Court upheld a lower court's decision that affirmed Boyertown Senior High School's transgender policy. In this case, six students sued the school for violating their privacy rights by allowing transgender students to use any locker rooms and bathrooms. [One student](#), Alexis Lightcap, said that the school "made me feel like I was the problem for feeling uncomfortable, unsafe and vulnerable with a boy in my bathroom." [Christiana Holcomb](#) of Alliance Defending Freedom, who represented the six students, stated that the school could not "violate every student's right to bodily privacy." The American Civil Liberties Union countered that "not only is the school's policy constitutional but striking it down would affirmatively violate the rights of transgender students." Both plaintiffs are considering appealing their cases. Social conservatives are especially interested in seeing if the courts will continue to expand the meaning of the word "sex" in civil rights laws to also include sexual orientation and gender identity and when the Supreme Court might take a case on this important issue.

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

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

[Supreme Court Lets Arkansas Pro-Life Bill Stand](#)

[Louisiana Governor Signs Pro-Life Bill Into Law Banning Abortions After 15 Weeks](#)

[Psychologist: Rejecting Values and Responsibility Was a Big Mistake](#)

[Trump Administration: Defending American Values](#)