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“The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable, because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds cannot follow the dictates of other men: It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator.”

James Madison

The Nation’s Report Card Shows Negative Scores from Common Core

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” recently released the results of the math and reading assessments of fourth and eighth graders from across the country; and the scores showed no growth overall, and, in some cases, a decline in the test scores from 2017. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos [called](#) the results “devastating” and charged that “this country is in a student achievement crisis.” In the area of reading, only one-third of the students scored at a proficient level in reading and math. Secretary DeVos further pointed out, “In fact, fourth-grade reading declined in 17 states and eighth-grade reading declined in 31.” Susanna Loeb of Brown University and the Annenberg Institute [noted](#) that while the scores for the highest performing students saw some increase, the scores for those students who test in the lower ten percent have consistently dropped in both reading and math since 2009, showing a widening achievement gap between these two groups. Several conservative education policy analysts, including Secretary DeVos, noted the increase in federal spending and programs in recent years has not benefited student achievement. Lindsey Burke of the Heritage Foundation [stated](#), “From the Great Society to No Child Left Behind to the Common Core national standards advanced under the Obama administration, Washington’s intervention in education has been a failure for students and taxpayers alike.” She also noted that most of the states that actually showed gains in student achievement were those that have school choice programs (AZ, FL, GA, MS, OK, and TN). Joy Pullman of The Federalist [connected](#) the lower NAEP scores to the Common Core Standards, noting that a significant drop in test scores actually began in 2015 which “perhaps not coincidentally . . . is the year states were required by the Obama administration to have fully phased in Common Core.” Pullman also points to a report released by the ACT organization that shows students’ ACT scores to be the lowest they have been in 15 years, and notes, “These students are the first to have completed all four high school years under Common Core.” Secretary DeVos offered a solution to the achievement problem, stating, “This administration has a transformational plan to help America’s forgotten students escape failing schools. By expanding education freedom, students can break out of the one-size-fits-all system and learn in the ways that will unlock their full potential. They deserve it. Parents demand it. And, it’s the only way to bring about the change our country desperately needs.”

Kentucky State Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Religious Liberty

The Kentucky Supreme Court has ruled [in favor](#) of a Christian businessman who declined to print T-shirts with messages that conflict with his biblical view of marriage. The case started in 2012, when Blaine Adamson, owner of the print shop Hands On Originals, was asked by the Gay and Lesbian Services Organization (GLSO) to print T-shirts promoting the upcoming Lexington Pride Festival. Adamson declined the order because as a Christian he could not promote pride in homosexuality. Although Adamson offered to direct GLSO to another printer that would gladly print the shirts, GLSO filed a discrimination complaint against Adamson with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission. The commission ruled that Adamson had violated the local public accommodation ordinance and ordered that he print messages contrary to his faith and participate in diversity training. Adamson successfully appealed his case to two lower courts before his victory last week at the Kentucky Supreme Court. In its opinion, the Kentucky High Court said that GLSO had no standing to sue Adamson because it was not an individual claiming discrimination. Although the court could not rule on the substance of the case, Justice David Buckingham did write a [concurring opinion](#) in which he stated that the commission “went beyond its charge of preventing discrimination in public accommodation and instead attempted to compel Hands On to engage in expression with which it disagreed,” which is in conflict with Supreme Court precedent.

Trump Administration Announces Rule to Protect Religious Foster Care Agencies

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has announced [a proposed rule to strengthen protections](#) for faith-based adoption and foster care agencies. The new rule reverses regulations passed under the previous administration that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, forcing many faith-based adoption and foster care agencies either to change their beliefs about marriage or close their doors to children in need of loving homes. Faith-based agencies are highly successful at placing children, especially children with special needs and older children, into loving homes. However, several adoption agencies have been either forced to close or [sued](#) because of their religious beliefs that children deserve homes with a married mother and father. The proposed rule would require faith-based agencies to follow only nondiscrimination laws that are passed by Congress, as opposed to the Obama-era regulation, and would require HHS to comply with Supreme Court precedent, including recent precedent protecting religious free exercise, in its grant programs. The [White House press release](#) concerning the proposed rule specifically mentions eliminating the “burden on the free exercise of religion” in its adoption grant programs. One White House official [stated](#), “This administration is committed to doing rule-making right, and to removing regulatory barriers that prevent non-profits from doing what they do best—serving the needy and vulnerable in their communities.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

[SBA List Celebrates President Trump’s Historic Judicial Confirmations](#)

[The Great Society and Opportunity Lost](#)

[Time to Put an Ice Pack on Social-Emotional Learning](#)

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