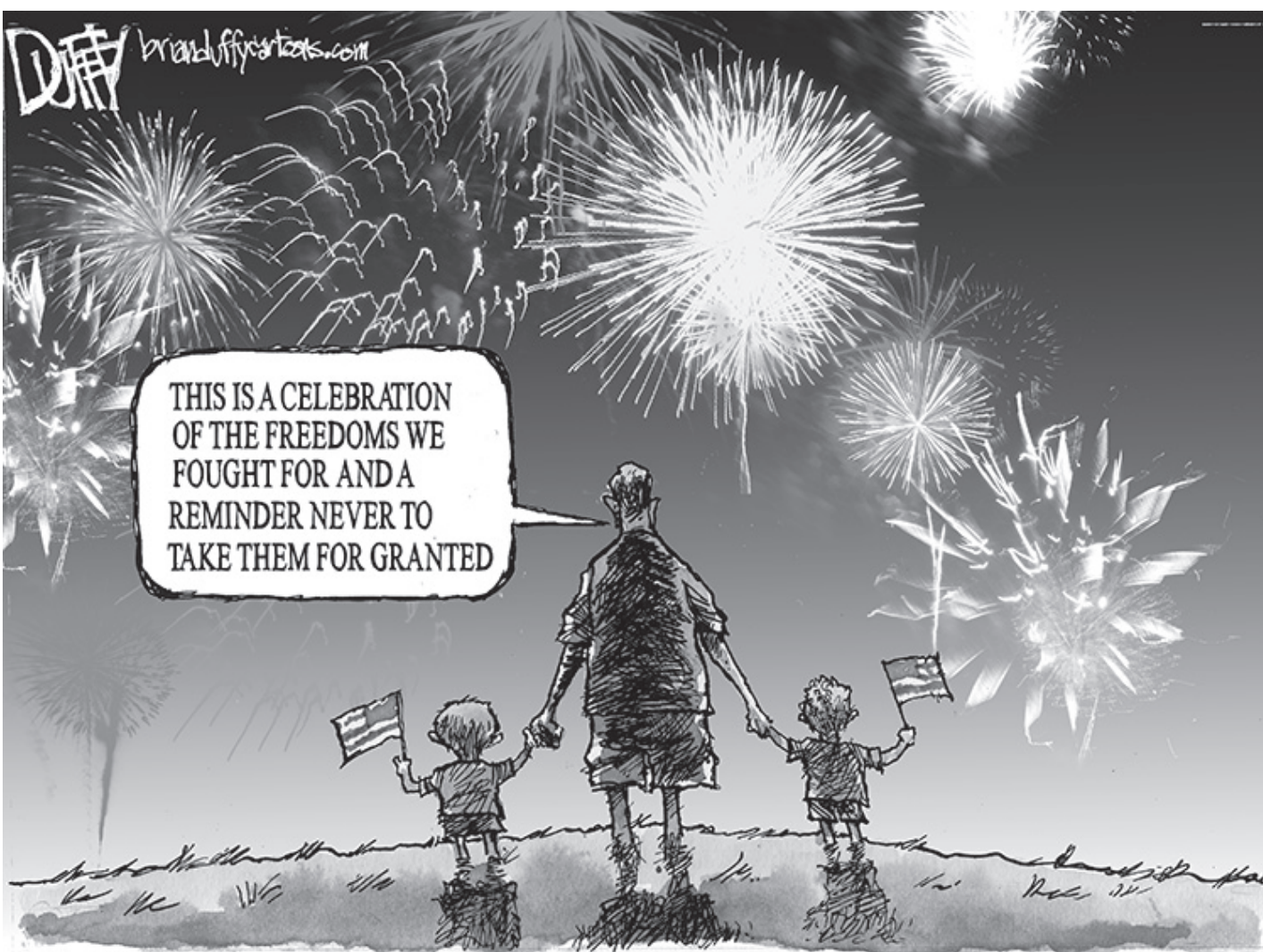


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OPINION

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Educational freedom surges among Supremes

By Jim Waters



A growing mountain of data shows school-choice programs help spur improvement in public education.

There's also a growing pile of Supreme Court decisions deeming states can't discriminate against religious schools participating in such programs.

In *Carson v. Makin* – the court's latest ruling on the issue – six of the nine justices agreed states can't discriminate against private schools which include religious instruction in their curriculums if they subsidize others that don't offer such teaching.

The case arose in Maine, which provides tuition assistance for children to attend private schools in the state's rural sparsely populated areas; more than half the state's school districts have no public high school.

Maine's education establishment wanted those dollars used to ensure students in these rural areas received a strictly secular education.

The state historically accomplished this by either assigning students to other public or private schools or by allowing tuition dollars to follow students to the schools they chose, along as the private schools chosen didn't engage in religious instruction.

Two families challenged the system, saying tuition dollars should follow their children to private religious schools where the curriculum is "biblically base[d]" and religion "integrated through all content areas."

Maine's actions in denying tuition to schools simply because they're religious or include faith-based teaching is clearly, as Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the majority, "discrimination against religion."

The political left claims taxpayers who don't adhere to the views contained in such teaching shouldn't be forced to pay for them.

Yet the same crowd has no qualms about coercing those same taxpayers to fund public schools which diametrically oppose their views and values and keeping their mouths shut about it.

The new Supreme Court ruling follows a 2017 decision prohibiting Missouri from excluding a church's participation in a grant program assisting

non-profits installing playground equipment made from recycled tires and a judgment in 2020 that Montana can't exclude private schools from public subsidies simply because they're religious.

It's too soon to know the new ruling's impact on a legal case involving legislation passed last year by Kentucky lawmakers that creates education opportunity accounts funded by voluntary donations from individuals and businesses which can be used for private and parochial schools by qualifying families in the commonwealth's largest counties.

But what should be clear is that the momentum in this nation – specifically in the courts – has shifted back toward a more constitutionally sound position – from funding systems to supporting families' choices regarding the place best suited for children to learn, even if it happens to be a school with a biblical worldview.

Momentum for educational liberty in general is also surging in the political sphere.

When the Iowa House – controlled by Republicans – failed this year to pass a bill allowing for 10,000 scholarships annually for students with learning needs or who are in families with qualifying incomes, Gov. Kim Reynolds,

a strong school-choice advocate, didn't settle for a weak outcome in a political compromise.

Instead, she endorsed challengers to incumbent school-choice opponents in the primaries, including one who unseated the Iowa House Education Committee chair.

Kentucky voters' determination to have stronger support for school choice in our state's own Republican House appears to be growing as well.

Pro-school-choice challengers during the recent primary election succeeded in defeating GOP incumbents who were either lukewarm supporters or, in some cases, outright opponents of providing Kentucky parents with expanded educational options.

Considering the political momentum we're seeing for school choice nationwide, that resolve could very well carry over to next year's gubernatorial election, just as happened in Virginia this year.

Jim Waters is president and CEO of the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Read previous columns at www.bipps.org. He can be reached at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com and @bipps on Twitter.

Congress just delivered major postal reform legislation, so why is the US Postal Service ignoring it?

BY KEVIN YODER

After the massive mail [slowdowns and postage hikes](#) of 2021, Congress took action to financially stabilize the U.S. Postal Service by passing a historic, bipartisan [postal reform bill](#). The bill freed the Postal Service from an unreasonable 2006 law demanding that it pre-fund retiree health benefits 75 years in advance—a requirement that put billions of dollars on the Postal Service's balance sheet each year and motivated it to keep hiking postage rates while reducing services.

Congress passed the 2022 postal reform legislation with the intent to strengthen this critical service and help the Postal Service avoid additional large rate increases and service cutbacks. However, Postal Service leadership has seemingly decided to stamp Congress's message "return to sender."

The very same day President Biden signed the monumental postal reform legislation, Postmaster General [Louis DeJoy](#) announced his plans to increase postage prices at an "[uncomfortable rate](#)" for some time to come. Specifically, DeJoy and the Postal Board of Governors intend to increase stamp prices again in July, again next January, and as often as twice each year after that. And they can, thanks to a recent Postal Regulatory Commission [ruling](#) giving DeJoy the power to initiate postage rates that outpace inflation.

In just a decade, Americans could be paying well over \$1 to mail a single letter. Unless Congress takes action again to hold the Postal Service accountable, let's just say we should all be buying "Forever Stamps" while they are still somewhat affordable.

As a businessman and a fellow Republican, DeJoy should know that raising prices generates fewer customers and can lead to less revenue. The same holds true for unnecessary postage increases. They will not only deter individuals from using the mail, but will also drive away businesses, newspapers, nonprofits, and charities—all of which generate more than half of all [postal revenues](#).

The Postal Service already anticipates losing [42% of mail volume](#) over the next decade, driven partly by massive rate increases. Additional unnecessary postage hikes could lead to a huge loss in revenue that will jeopardize the survival of the Postal Service itself and its workforce of 650,000 Americans, many of whom are veterans.

Whether it brings something as special as a handwritten card or something as necessary as medication, the U.S. Postal Service is the only institution capable of going the last mile to reach, serve, and tangibly link every American. Some claim that private couriers like FedEx and UPS could replace the U.S. Postal Service, but that's simply not true.

The Postal Service is unique in that it's obligated to serve every American. It processes more than [425 million pieces of mail](#) (not including packages) each day, delivering them to and from a staggering [163 million](#) delivery points in all of the country's more than [41,000 zip codes](#). The Postal Service goes the last mile, no matter how rural or remote the address—and that's something no private courier could, or would, do.

What can be done to right the ship? First and foremost, the recently passed postal reform legislation can't be ignored by Postal Service leaders. There are new members of the Board of Governors who should push to challenge DeJoy's plans. At the same time, the Postal Regulatory Commission needs to review the freedom it gave to the Postal Service to raise rates.

But if none of these things happen, Congress needs to step in and take action.

Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat will stop the Postal Service, but excessive rates and reduced service just might.

Former Congressman Kevin Yoder (R-Kan.) is executive director of [Keep US Posted](#), an alliance consisting of consumer interests, newspapers, nonprofits, industry groups and businesses advocating for a strong, affordable, reliable Postal Service. This article was originally [published by The Hill](#).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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