

A TOUGH WEEK FOR SECULARISTS



Bill Donohue comments on some setbacks for secular activists:

It's been a tough week for secular activists, with advances for religious freedom and school choice, and a new Pew Research survey showing a majority of Americans want a religious believer as president.

In Kentucky, a federal judge ruled that the state could not deny a sales tax rebate to a Christian group, Answers in Genesis (AiG) for a theme park it is constructing featuring a life-size Noah's Ark replica. Since the park will be a "for-profit" enterprise, it is entitled to the sales tax rebate like any other for-profit business in the state, said U.S. District Judge Gregory Van Tatenhove. To deny it would amount to pressuring AiG "to give up its religious beliefs, purpose or practice in order to receive a government benefit," the judge said. AiG president Ken Ham said "The law is crystal clear that the state cannot discriminate against a Christian group simply because of its viewpoint." The ruling was a defeat for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which continues to oppose the rebate for AiG.

This week is National School Choice Week. In Tennessee, Gov. Bill Halsam's bill to provide such choice, in the form of educational vouchers for parents of children in low performing public schools, advanced through a crucial House committee. Americans United opposes this bill, because many (though not all) of the private school alternatives are faith-based. Americans United would keep children trapped in failing public schools rather than allow them to choose a quality education in a faith-based school.

Tonight, a group of atheists will gather in protest outside the Republican presidential debate in Des Moines, Iowa. They are dismayed that “a growing number of presidential candidates are basing much of their candidacy on their religious beliefs.” Presumably they are even more dismayed by the latest Pew Survey showing that 51 percent of Americans would be less likely to vote for a candidate who does not believe in God. Only six percent would be more likely to vote for such a candidate.

All in all, it was a tough week for secularists—and a very good one for believers—from a federal courthouse, to a state legislature, to the public square.