

U.S. Supreme Court Roundup

2025 was a great year with many excellent decisions coming out of the U.S. Supreme Court. Below are summaries of the major decisions.

Sex Damaging Medical Treatments for Minors: In a 6-3 decision, following the liberal/conservative split in the court, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld as constitutional a Tennessee law that protected minors from medical treatments that damage or destroy their reproductive systems. The Tennessee law the high court upheld would prohibit healthcare providers from giving minors puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones or conducting surgeries with the intent to change their sex. The treatments are permitted for other medical conditions.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the opinion for the majority and said that Tennessee's law doesn't violate the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. That clause requires that people in similar circumstances be treated the same legally. He said that the law applies to all minors equally regardless of their sex. He also said that medical science has shown that these treatments have done tremendous damage to children's bodies physically and in many cases have had irreversible effects. He noted that many children, when they get older, have ended up regretting having had these treatments. He concluded that questions regarding this policy should be left to the people and their elected representatives.

26 other states have a law similar to Tennessee's and Iowa is one of those states. This is a big victory and great news for the children of Iowa as well as those of Tennessee and the other states.

Insurance Coverage of Abortion: The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that religious groups who do not believe in abortion on demand cannot be compelled to fund it. The state of New York had forced groups such as churches to cover abortion in their health insurance plans for employees. Now the state will be forced to drop that requirement. A great victory for religious liberty.

Medicaid Funding of Abortion Organizations: In a 6-3 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states are allowed to cut off taxpayer funding from Planned Parenthood or abortion organizations. This means states can direct Medicaid funding to actual health care providers who will provide comprehensive medical care to women in crisis pregnancies instead of just abortions. A really solid victory for the lives of unborn babies and women.

Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote the opinion for the majority and said that patients are not allowed to sue just because a state ends its coverage for their preferred provider.

Iowa has already cut off state taxpayer funding to abortion organizations in Medicaid, Title X, and sex education grant programs. It took a number of years but the Iowa Supreme Court finally ruled on Iowa's side upholding the state's ability to cut off funding from abortionists.

Religious Freedom and Parents' Rights in Education: The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in another 6-3 decision that parents are allowed to opt their children out of curriculum and instruction that they believe is in opposition to their religious beliefs. Further, the high court also said that the school must inform the parents and must give them the option to withdraw their children from the teaching.

A public school in Maryland had denied parents the right to opt their child out of pro-LGBTQ teaching. The district had allowed opt-outs for other areas of teaching but not this. Several parents from diverse religious backgrounds sued. The court issued a preliminary injunction in favor of the parents and against the school while the case works its way through the courts.

The school's main argument was that so many parents were seeking opt-outs that the district couldn't accommodate them all. But Justice Alito said that "you don't get to create a problem and then deprive people of constitutional rights because the problem's too big".

In Iowa parents' rights to opt their child out of instruction the parents find objectionable on religious grounds is already recognized.

Another great victory for religious freedom and parents' rights.

Age Verification for Pornographic Websites: In a 6-3 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states may require pornographic websites to verify the age of their users to ensure that minors are not accessing these websites. This was in response to a Texas law requiring pornographic websites implement an age verification system. That law was challenged.

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote the majority opinion and said the state has clear authority to prevent children from freely accessing sexually explicit materials. He also said adults don't have a 1st Amendment right to avoid age verification and that ID checks at physical stores have been upheld by the court for decades. So the same should apply to digital "outlets".

A tremendous win for children.

Nearly half of all the states have passed an age verification law but Iowa is not one of them. I have worked on this kind of law for several years now. It passed the Iowa House this past session and made it through a Senate committee. It only needs a Senate floor vote to pass. It can still be taken up by the Senate next session. We need to get this done. There is absolutely no good reason not to do this. Iowa's children deserve protection as much as those in other states do.

Court Injunctions: In still another 6-3 decision the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that federal district courts cannot issue universal injunctions, meaning injunctions that apply to the whole country. Their injunctions can only apply in their districts or to the particular plaintiffs bringing the lawsuit.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote the majority opinion and said that "these injunctions-known as 'universal injunctions'-likely exceed the equitable authority that Congress has granted to federal courts."

The issue that brought this case forward was President Trump's executive order banning birthright citizenship, that is, whether a baby born to parents who are in the country illegally can be considered a citizen. The court did not weigh in on the constitutionality of birthright citizenship, but instead

sent the case back to the lower courts to decide that issue. Likely it will end up before the Supreme Court again.

This has been a long-needed decision. Courts have been issuing universal injunctions for many years now, long before President Trump issued his executive order. Justice Barrett is correct that this practice is an overreach.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy