



Arkansas CITIZEN

JANUARY 2026

The following is from Family Council's Assistant Director, David Cox:

Dear Friends,

For many people, January offers a fresh start. Another year is behind us, and a new year is just beginning. I'm sure most of us have heard statistics about how many New Year's Resolutions don't survive to Valentine's Day, and I personally quit making resolutions a long time ago. But I suppose most of us have at least a few goals for the new year, and I'm no different. Maybe you want to complete a "Bible in a Year" plan for 2026. Some of us may want to exercise, drop the weight we gained in December, or spend more time with family. There's nothing wrong with that. Back in the 1800s, students in America read the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, and there's a tradition of reading some of Franklin's thoughts about setting goals every January. Recently, I was reading from Franklin's autobiography, and I thought I might share a little of what I learned:

By modern standards, Benjamin Franklin was a man of faith. He was raised a Presbyterian, and he gave charitably to the Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, but Franklin admits that he rarely went to church. However, he wrote that he never doubted God's existence. He believed that God made the world and "governed it by His Providence." He wrote that the best way to serve God was by "doing good to man." He also believed "that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and all virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter." Franklin also wrote that he prayed daily for wisdom from God. I wouldn't go so far as to say he was a Christian, but if Benjamin Franklin were alive today, most people would likely call him a man of faith.

Franklin wanted to be a good and wise man. One of Franklin's goals was "moral perfection" in his life. He famously went so far as to make a list of 13 virtues he believed would get him there: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility. Franklin kept a notebook where he recorded when he failed in these areas. He also set aside time daily for examining his own character. His goal was to be perfect and wise.

Franklin eventually understood that it's impossible to be perfect. Franklin said, "In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down... it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself... [If I] had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility." Franklin ultimately admitted that he never became perfect, but he was "a better and a happier man" for at least trying.

As Christians, we know that none of us is perfect. That's why Christ came. We're saved by grace through faith and not by our works (Ephesians 2:8–9). We may never be perfect on this side of Heaven, but that shouldn't stop us from trying to be more like Christ. We may be "better and happier" for at least trying.

Family Council has a lot of goals for the new year. I hope you will keep reading this letter to learn more about some of the goals we have already accomplished and some that we have planned for the coming months.



inside:

A New Year Offers Opportunities for a New Beginning

Customers Cry Fowl as Chick-fil-A Waffles Over Wokeness

& MORE



Executive Director Jerry Cox

My Thoughts: A New Year Offers Opportunities for a New Beginning

By Jerry Cox, Executive Director

January always seems to bring opportunities for a new beginning. My team and I have been thinking about our goals for 2026. Here is just a little of what we hope to accomplish in the coming year:

Help Elect Qualified Candidates.

Since 1990, our Arkansas Voter's Guide has been Arkansas' leading

source of non-partisan information on candidates. We survey the candidates, and we share their answers in print and online. How candidates answer critical questions on abortion, education, guns, and religious freedom helps voters decide which candidates reflect their values. We plan to distribute thousands of voter's guides in February and March.

Stand Up for 32,000 Arkansas Homeschoolers. Since 1998, our Education Alliance division has been the state-wide hub for homeschooling and defending parents' right to teach their children at home. At the Capitol, we have stopped harmful bills and fought to ensure homeschoolers are included in funding under the LEARNS Act. When all is said and done, good parents teaching their children at home may prove to be the most powerful weapon against the moral and cultural decay plaguing our state and nation.

Stop Abortion by Supporting Pregnancy Help Organizations. Now that abortion is generally prohibited, we need to focus on reducing the demand for abortion. More than 60 pregnancy help organizations across Arkansas are ready to help women and girls facing unplanned pregnancies. Since 2022, we have worked with the governor and

lawmakers each year to secure millions of dollars in funding for state grants. We plan to continue that work in 2026.

Bring a Godly Influence into the Public Arena. We are helping Arkansas' pastors and churches get involved. The Arkansas Church Ambassador Network, a new division of Family Council, is implementing a comprehensive plan involving online information, social media, email, printed reports, and other resources to equip pastors when it comes to social and moral issues. This will enable them to confidently educate their members and involve their church. We are helping pastors and lawmakers establish relationships that will be good for all Arkansans. We plan to bring at least 500 pastors to the State Capitol in 2026 to meet with lawmakers and bring a godly influence into the halls of government. Ultimately, we are creating opportunities for ministers to pray with elected officials, share God's word, and help Arkansans grow in their faith.

Organize 50 Conservative Arkansas Attorneys to Get into the Fight. We are excited about mobilizing a state-wide network of volunteer attorneys who can help draft laws, analyze ballot measures, testify at the Capitol, and work with legal experts. The Arkansas Justice Institute, a new initiative by Family Council, will orchestrate this effort.

Bringing Faith Back to Public Schools and Public Buildings. Family Council is also working with other groups to expand religious freedom in schools, place copies of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, and promote academic study of the Bible and released time for religious instruction during school hours. Family Council's Faith at School Toolkit equips Arkansans to do this and more.

Customers Cry Fowl as Chick-fil-A Waffles Over Wokeness

A Utah Chick-fil-A franchise recently drew backlash from customers after posting photos celebrating a same-sex marriage. On December 4, *The Washington Stand* reported the restaurant posted images of two married men with the caption "CONGRATULATIONS TO THE HAPPY COUPLE!" The post has since been removed. This incident highlights ongoing problems with Chick-fil-A's corporate direction and leadership.

Once upon a time, Chick-fil-A was known for its traditional, Christian values, but the company has bowed to pressure from liberal organizations. The company initially supported traditional marriage—the union of one man to one woman. In 2014, Chick-fil-A President Dan Cathy told an interviewer he regretted that decision, calling it "a mistake." Going forward, Cathy indicated Chick-fil-A's priority would be courting a new generation of consumers. In 2019, news

outlets reported Chick-fil-A had stopped donating to charities like the Salvation Army and Fellowship of Christian Athletes and had begun supporting leftwing organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center and Covenant House, which hosts Drag Queen Story Hours.

In the past two years, companies like Walmart, Target, Toyota, John Deere, Tractor Supply, Harley Davidson, and Lowe's, as well as major financial institutions have rolled back pro-LGBT diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in response to consumer backlash. But Chick-fil-A keeps moving in the opposite direction. The restaurant chain still employs a vice president of DEI. It quietly renamed its DEI program "Better at Together," but it still promotes the same woke principles.

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Customers Cry Fowl as Chick-fil-A Waffles Over Wokeness (continued)

People are obviously tired of pro-LGBT pandering by Corporate America. In 2023, Bud Light managed to overthrow itself as the number-one beer in America after sending transgender social media influencer Dylan Mulvaney a novelty can of Bud Light with Mulvaney's picture on it. The company has never fully recovered from the boycotts that came from that. Target has quietly dropped its LGBT Pride merchandise, and entertainment giants like Pixar and Disney have removed pro-LGBT elements from their storylines. Chick-fil-A would do well to learn from other corporations' mistakes, stop its pro-LGBT pandering, and return to the values it used to hold.

Home School Numbers Hit Record Highs Across America

Home schooling continues to surge across the United States. New data shows growth rates nearly triple what they were before the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found home school enrollment grew 5.4% in the 2024-2025 school year—compared to just 2% growth before COVID-19. Homeschooling in Arkansas has surged since 2020. In 2019 there were a little less than 22,000 homeschoolers in Arkansas. In early 2020, those numbers climbed to 22,249. By 2024, homeschooling surged to 32,767 students. We believe those numbers could continue to rise in the coming years.

Home schooling offers more than an education. It gives parents the freedom to pass their values and convictions to their children.

Family Council has always believed families deserve options when it comes to education. That's one reason we support home schooling. Research shows parental involvement generally is tied to better educational outcomes for children. That's true no matter how families choose to educate their children—but home schooling is particularly good for many families, because it lets them choose the education that's best for them. Home schooling offers more than an education. It gives parents the freedom to pass their values and convictions to their children. Families can customize curriculum, set their own schedules, and ensure their children receive one-on-one attention that large public school classrooms cannot always provide. It's good to see families taking advantage of everything homeschooling has to offer.

Arkansas Gets a Failing Grade Worth Framing

Last year the State of Arkansas received a failing grade from the radical group Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) on its 2025 United States Sex Education report card. SIECUS has a reputation of promoting inappropriate sexual material in schools. SIECUS gave Arkansas a failing grade largely thanks to good legislation conservatives in Arkansas have enacted to protect children from groups like SIECUS.

The 2025 SIECUS report card for Arkansas specifically criticized state laws protecting students from explicit material and pro-LGBT indoctrination at school. It also took issue with Arkansas' sexual risk avoidance education program that promotes abstinence, and it criticized the state's good, pro-life laws—including laws that keep abortionists and their affiliates out of public schools.

We know from experience that the kind of sex education that groups like SIECUS promote simply is ineffective. During the 1980s and early 1990s liberals in Arkansas promoted comprehensive sex education in public schools, but the teen birth rate and abortion rate remained high. What finally worked for Arkansas, however, was Gov. Huckabee's abstinence education initiative. The program was so successful that it received national attention. **Given comprehensive sex education's poor track record, receiving a failing grade on the SIECUS's report card is something Arkansans can actually celebrate.**

Nearly Half of College Students Agree That Words Are Violence: New Survey

A recent survey reveals nearly half of American college students believe "words can be violence." After Charlie Kirk's assassination in September, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression commissioned a survey that found 48% of students either "completely" or "mostly" agree with the statement "words can be violence." The survey also found 29% agreed that "silence is violence."

As John Stonestreet at the Colson Center often says, "ideas have consequences and bad ideas have victims." That is what makes these survey findings so deeply troubling. It's one thing to say, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer is often quoted, that "silence in the face of evil is itself evil." It's another thing to say that "silence is violence." And how is there supposed to be civil discourse if "words can be violence"? If young adults view disagreement as violence, it shuts down legitimate speech and—as we have seen—it can lead to actual violence. It's a "bad idea" with serious consequences.

Ozark Voters Reject Public Drinking District Downtown

On November 18, voters in Ozark overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to authorize public drinking in an "entertainment district" downtown. The Ozark City Council passed an ordinance on April 15, 2025, establishing the district, but citizens rejected the public drinking ordinance at a special election, with 69% saying it should be repealed. One of the supporters of the Ozark entertainment district was the group Main Street Ozark. Prior to the special election, Main Street Ozark's CEO issued a statement saying, "communities across Arkansas have consistently reported no significant increases in crime after adopting entertainment districts." Unfortunately, that hasn't been the case.

In 2019, El Dorado in Union County became one of the first cities in Arkansas to establish an entertainment district. However, in 2024 the city council voted unanimously to shut down public drinking due to ongoing problems with fighting, vandalism, and other disorderly behavior in the district. As we have said for years, public drinking is a scourge on the community. It raises serious concerns about drunk driving and public safety. Public drinking doesn't attract new businesses, bolster the economy, or revitalize Main Street. It hurts neighborhoods and families. Ozark voters made the right call by keeping public drinking out of their community.

It's Almost Time for the 2026 Voter's Guide

Do you know where your candidates stand on the issues that matter to you? This year Arkansans will cast votes in state and local elections. Early voting will start in just a few weeks, on February 16, and the spring primary will happen on Tuesday, March 3. Most voters may think they know where their candidates stand, but do they really?

In 1990, Family Council published its very first Arkansas Voter's Guide. We surveyed the candidates on a wide variety of issues, and we published their responses. We have done that every election cycle since then. Our guide is different from most. We don't endorse candidates. We ask them questions, and we let their responses speak for themselves. Last month, Family Council began surveying candidates for our 2026 Arkansas Voter's Guide. The 2026 guide should be available in February.

You should receive a free copy of the guide in next month's Arkansas Citizen update letter. If you would like to pre-order additional copies of the 2026 Arkansas Voter's Guide for your family, friends, church, or Sunday school, you can fill out the enclosed form and mail it back to our office. **You can also go to ArkansasVotersGuide.com or call our office at (501) 375-7000 to request free guides and learn more about the candidates.**

We Need Your Help

If you are able, I hope you will consider sending Family Council a generous, tax-deductible donation to help us with all the work we want to accomplish this year. I promise we will do our best to stretch your gift as far as we can as we do this important work. **Thank you for standing with us. It's so good to have friends like you who believe in what we do.** Please let me know if there is anything my staff or I can do for you.

Sincerely,

Jerry Cox, President

Thank you!!