

# NORTH STATE JOURNAL

## U.S. Supreme Court hands down key decisions

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June 28, 2017

In what was considered an overall victorious week for conservatives the U.S. Supreme Court handed down several decisions that sided with religious liberties, temporary reinstatement of President Donald Trump's travel ban, and allowing some nonviolent convicted felons to challenge a federal ban on them owning fire arms.

Monday was the last of this Supreme Court session, but the day also had a tense undercurrent as rumors circulated that Justice Anthony Kennedy, 81, could announce his retirement soon. Kennedy aides have reported that he is considering the move, which would give Trump an historic opportunity to nominate a second Supreme Court Justice in the first six months of his tenure.

U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts (seated C) leads Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (front row, L-R), Justice Anthony Kennedy, Justice Clarence Thomas, Justice Stephen Breyer, Justice Elena Kagan (back row, L-R), Justice Samuel Alito, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and Justice Neil Gorsuch in taking a new family photo including Gorsuch, their most recent addition, at the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C., U.S., June 1, 2017.

Trump's first pick, Justice Neil Gorsuch, confirmed in April, is already staking out ground on the court's right, adding his voice to the biggest controversies.

In a flurry of activity at the court on Monday, Gorsuch showed his inclination to agree with fellow conservative Justice Clarence Thomas. At a minimum, he is so far living up to Trump's claim that he would be a conservative in the mold of the man he replaced, Justice Antonin Scalia, who died last year.

The court has a 5-4 conservative majority, dismaying liberal court watchers. Conservatives, meanwhile, are delighted. Their hope that Gorsuch, 49, would be a solid vote on the right, would appear to be well founded. In the cases where the court has been divided, he has reliably stuck with the conservative wing while showing something of an independent streak similar to Thomas.

"Gorsuch is rapidly becoming my favorite justice," said Ilya Shapiro, a lawyer with the libertarian Cato Institute.

In the biggest dispute before the justices, the court handed a partial win to Trump by partly reviving his travel ban that he has said is needed for security reasons. Gorsuch, with two of the court's other conservatives, said they would have voted to allow the entire ban to go into effect.

When the court also declined to hear what would have been a major gun rights case on whether the constitutional right to keep firearms for self-defense extends outside the home, only two of the nine justices dissented. One was Thomas. The other was Gorsuch.

Thomas, Gorsuch and fellow conservative Samuel Alito were also the only dissenters as the court threw out an Arkansas court ruling that allowed the state to refuse to list both same-sex spouses on birth certificates.

“It could be that he is more similar to Thomas than Scalia. If he continues this pattern it might be significant,” said Ilya Somin, a libertarian law professor at George Mason University.

Here are some of the historic decisions from Monday:

### Gun control

The high court on Monday dealt a blow to gun control advocates by opening the door for some convicted felons to challenge a federal ban on them owning firearms.

The justices let stand a lower court’s ruling that uniformly denying some nonviolent felons the right to own guns violated the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment, which protects the right to “keep and bear arms.” Permission for felons to own a gun would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

In another decision, the court on Monday sidestepped one of the most hotly contested gun rights disputes in years, declining to rule in a California case on whether a person’s constitutional right to keep firearms for self-defense extends outside the home.

### Religious rights

The Supreme Court ruled on Monday that churches and other religious entities cannot be flatly denied public money even in states where constitutions explicitly ban such funding.

The justices, in a 7-2 ruling, sided with Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Mo., which sued after being denied access to a state grant program that helps nonprofit groups buy rubber playground surfaces made from recycled tires.

Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the court’s majority, said the case is express discrimination based on religion. “The exclusion of Trinity Lutheran from a public benefit for which it is otherwise qualified, solely because it is a church, is odious to our Constitution” and “cannot stand,” he wrote.

The ruling could help religious organizations nationwide win public dollars at least for certain purposes, such as health and safety. It also could buttress the case for using publicly funded vouchers to send children to religious schools rather than public schools.

In another religious liberties case, the high court on Monday agreed to decide a major case on whether business owners can refuse to service gay couples if they oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds. The case involves Christian baker Jack Phillips in Colorado who declined to make a wedding cake for two men. Phillips contends a law requiring him to provide services

violated his rights to freedom of speech and free exercise of religion under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.

### Travel ban

The justices also handed a victory to Trump on Monday by reviving parts of a travel ban saying it was needed for national security. The justices narrowed the scope of lower court rulings that had completely blocked key parts of a March 6 executive order that Trump had said was needed to prevent terrorism in the United States, allowing his temporary ban to go into effect for people with no strong ties such as family or business to the U.S.

Trump's March 6 order called for a blanket 90-day ban on people from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen and a 120-day ban on all refugees while the government implemented stronger vetting procedures. The court allowed a limited version of the refugee ban, which had also been blocked by courts, to go into effect.

### Securities

Nearly 30 banks that underwrote billions in debt offerings by Lehman Brothers before Lehman collapsed in 2008 will not have to defend a securities fraud lawsuit by a big California pension fund, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Monday.

The justices ruled 5-4 that the California Public Employees' Retirement System waited too long to sue the banks, upholding a federal appeals court decision throwing out the lawsuit.

The U.S. Supreme Court also agreed on Monday to consider whether corporate insiders who blow the whistle on their employers are shielded from retaliation if they only report alleged misconduct internally rather than to the government's Securities and Exchange Commission.

The justices will hear Digital Realty Trust's appeal of a lower court ruling in favor of Paul Somers, an executive fired by the San Francisco-based company after he complained internally about alleged misconduct by his supervisor but never reported the matter to the SEC.

On Tuesday, the court continued to release a list of cases they will take up in their next session in October. Among them is whether or not those injured in a 1997 bombing attack in Jerusalem can seek to enforce a \$71 million judgment against Iran over its alleged role by seizing ancient Persian artifacts held by two Chicago museums. At issue is how to determine what assets are immune from seizure under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, a federal law that restricts when foreign entities can be sued in U.S. courts.

The court will also hear New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's bid to revive a state statute legalizing sports betting that was struck down by lower courts as a violation of federal law.

New Jersey had asked the Supreme Court to hear its appeal of an August 2016 ruling by the Philadelphia-based 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that its law violated the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act. New Jersey argues that the federal law infringes upon state sovereignty as laid out in the U.S. Constitution.