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*"It does not matter where we come from or what we look like. If we recognize our abilities, are willing to learn and to use what we know in helping others, we will always have a place in the world."*

**Ben Carson**

**"No Child Left Behind" Waivers Update**

In September, President Obama [announced](#) a plan that would allow states to apply for relief waivers from the unrealistic [benchmarks](#) set forth in the "No Child Left Behind Act." The law requires states to attain 100% proficiency in students' math and reading by 2014 or face punitive measures. Although 39 states have indicated that they would apply for the waivers, only 11 [states](#) actually submitted applications in the first round. Upon initial review of the applications, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent a [letter](#) to the applicants outlining concerns with their proposals. Both Senator Tom Harkin and Rep. George Miller authored a January 17 letter to the Secretary urging him to keep pressure on states to craft "robust and meaningful accountability measures" in their plans. Nine of the eleven applicants created "super subgroups" (groups including English language learners, students with disabilities, and minorities). According to NCLB, disaggregation of student achievement was mandated and schools received failing designations even if one segment of the student population performed unsatisfactorily on tests. While the issue of [accountability](#) for all students is important, the Administration's decision to offer waivers linked to adoption of favored reforms and standards is highly problematic for a variety of reasons. The Department has not announced which states will receive waivers.

**Cancer Research Foundation Defunds Planned Parenthood**

Pro-life advocates welcome [news](#) that the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation will no longer award grants to Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider. Pro-life groups have [praised](#) the foundation "for seeing the contradiction between its lifesaving work and its relationship with an abortionist that has ended millions of lives." Last year, the foundation awarded over \$680,000 to Planned Parenthood for cancer screening services. This year, the foundation [changed](#) the grant criteria to bar the awarding of funds to any entity that is under investigation at a local, state, or federal level. Since Rep. Cliff Stearns is conducting an [investigation](#) of Planned Parenthood, it is therefore ineligible to receive funds. Pressure from pro-life advocates had caused some groups such as the Southern Baptist Convention (that recalled a line of pink Bibles supporting the foundation) to withdraw their support. While Planned Parenthood's president expressed dismay and warned that women will no longer have access to critical "preventive services," Live Action president Lila Rose (who filmed a series of [videos](#) exposing Planned Parenthood) counters that allegations of criminal cover-ups and Medicaid overbilling coupled with the [fact](#) that clinics do not have mammogram machines on site negate these arguments. Planned Parenthood is trying to use this loss of support as a fundraising [opportunity](#). For more information on this issue [click here](#).

**Christian Student Wins Religious Liberty Case**

The Alliance Defense Fund is celebrating a great [victory](#) for conscience rights. In 2009, Julea Ward, an Eastern Michigan University graduate counseling student, followed longstanding procedure when she

referred a patient to another counselor because she was unable to offer counsel affirming the lifestyle of the patient. Subsequently, she was reprimanded by her superiors, verbally castigated by school officials who belittled her beliefs, ordered to take remediation classes, and expelled from graduate school. This week, the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals absolved Ms. Ward of wrongdoing in the case. In the decision, Justices clearly stated that “a university cannot compel a student to alter or violate her belief systems based on a phantom policy as the price for obtaining a degree.” To read the full press release [click here](#).

### **New Jersey Legislature Votes on Same-Sex Marriage Measure**

The NJ State Senate Judiciary Committee voted 8-4 in favor of the so-called “Marriage Equality and Religious Exemption Act.” Although Governor Chris Christie has stated that he will veto the bill, he has drawn [criticism](#) from African American leaders for controversial statements that seemingly compared gay rights with the civil rights movement. He has since clarified his comments and indicated that he would like the issue to be decided by the voters in the 2012 election. Traditional marriage groups such as the National Organization for Marriage are continuing to [monitor](#) the situation.

### **HHS Contraceptive Mandate Update**

As a result of an amendment to the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care” Act of 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services charged the Institute of Medicine with a comprehensive list of women’s health related “preventive services” that would be offered by all insurance plans at no cost. Despite receiving thousands of concerns from religious groups, the [guidelines](#) adopted by HHS included only a narrow religious exemption that would result in many religious employers (Christian colleges, schools, organizations, etc.) covering abortions, abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraceptives by August 2012. The Administration recently [announced](#) that groups with religious and moral objections would have an additional year to comply. This week, White House press secretary Jay Carney has continued to characterize the decision as an “appropriate balance” between religious liberty and access to essential healthcare services. A [firestorm](#) was ignited over the weekend as Catholic Bishops read letters to their congregants during mass and the media became aware of the controversy. Legislative fixes such as Rep. Jeff Fortenberry’s “Respect for Rights of Conscience Act” (H.R. [1179](#)/S. [1467](#)) which has 108 co-sponsors in the House and 25 co-sponsors in the Senate are being considered as remedies to this regulatory problem. On Tuesday, Senator Marco Rubio [introduced](#) the “Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 2012” that specifically addresses the [issues](#) in the healthcare law.

### **National Marriage Week USA**

National Marriage Week USA will be celebrated February 7-14, 2012. Since 1996, the event’s sponsors have worked to bring international [attention](#) to the importance and benefits of marriage. To find more information about events in your area [click here](#).

### **In Case You Missed It:**

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Media Ignore March for Life](#)

[State of the Unborn 2012](#)

[Encouraging Education Reform from the Ground Up](#)