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No individual has any right to come into the world and go out of it without leaving something behind.

George Washington Carver

Wisconsin Teachers Union Controversy

For over a week, media attention has been focused on the battle between Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, the state senate, and the unions. During his campaign, Governor Walker's proposals for dealing with budget reduction were met with a media blitz by the unions. Among other things, the controversial legislation now before the senate would increase the contribution made by teachers to their health care plan and pensions, decrease workers' collective bargaining rights, and prohibit the state from collecting union dues from state employees. Annually, some union members pay an average of \$500 to \$600 in union dues, while teachers may pay up to \$1,000. Union leaders oppose this bill because it would eliminate automatic deduction of dues from paychecks, make joining voluntary, and mandate that secret ballot elections be held to determine whether workers wanted to continue to be represented by a union. Fred Siegel, a prominent labor historian, [told](#) John Fund of the *Wall Street Journal*, "Ending dues deductions breaks the political cycle in which government collects dues, gives them to the unions, who then use the dues to back their favorite candidates and also lobby for bigger government and more pay and benefits." Labor unions have traditionally been one of the largest sources of funding for the Democratic Party. During President Obama's candidacy, the unions spent about \$400 million on ads and get-out-the-vote efforts. *National Review* author Mona Charen has [defined this battle](#) as a clash between special interests (300,000 people) and the public's interest (5.6 million people). The teachers' unions have been joined by state police and firefighters who fear that their collective bargaining rights and benefits may be the target of later cuts during Wisconsin's tough economic times. Public sentiment has been turning against the unions as the protests have highlighted the disparity between the income and benefits of the union members and those with comparable jobs in the private sector. For example, the average Wisconsin employee contributes 29% to his healthcare while union members contribute only 6% to their plans. Also, teacher "sick days" during the last week have caused multiple school closures and created childcare issues for parents. This protracted legislative battle of wills has been intensified by the fourteen senate Democrats who have left the state in an attempt to avoid voting on the bill. Meanwhile, the Republican majority has continued to conduct business on measures that do not need a quorum. Growing public pressure has called for the Democrats to return and do the jobs they were elected to do by the people. In the face of intense union pressure, the [American Majority](#) has partnered with the Tea Party to support Governor Walker by holding their own rally (10,000 attendees), online petition (over 70,000 signatures), and by organizing a nationwide campaign ([standwithwalker.com](#)). From the President's group Organizing for America to AFL-CIO CEO Richard Trunka, outside forces have weighed in on this controversy over the last week. On Tuesday, the Governor warned that failure to pass the bill could potentially result in the loss of [1500 jobs](#) in the coming months. Similar measures proposed in states such as Indiana, Ohio, and Massachusetts have been met with the same strenuous union [protests](#) and demonstrations.

DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Update

Committee hearings to determine the fate of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP) were held last week. Speaker of the House John Boehner introduced [H.R. 471](#) to revive funding for the program that provides low income D.C. children with increased school choice options. Enacted in 2004, the successful program was defunded in 2009. Children already enrolled in the program were allowed to finish, but no new applicants were accepted for consideration. Since its inception, over 3700 children, mostly minorities, have been helped by the program. According to the Department of Education's evaluation, participants had a significantly higher graduation rate than their public school counterparts and parents were more satisfied with the safety of the schools. Speaker Boehner, formerly the Education and Workforce Committee Chairman, has demonstrated that this initiative is one of his main legislative priorities by inviting children from the program to attend the State of the Union with him, offering this bill early in the Congress, and lending his vocal support to National School Choice Week. At the [hearing](#), Senator Joseph Lieberman (D) and Senator Susan Collins (R) declared that the program should be revived or that public school funding would be cut by as much as 60 million dollars. The measure currently has bipartisan support (1/3 of the House Democratic caucus). Former DC Mayor Vincent Gray opposed the bill at the hearing, citing the usual concerns that any cut in public school funding is detrimental. It is interesting to note that public schools received an additional funding equal to the 14 million the DCOSP received when it

was enacted in 2004. In a reversal of his previous position, City Council Chairman Kwame Brown testified in support of the OSP, noting, “As a parent myself, I know that the most fundamental instinct of parents is to seek what is best for their children. I cannot look a working mother in the eye and tell her that she deserves less choice, not more.”

Department of Education Higher Education Regulations Update

In November of 2010, the Department of Education released a massive regulatory package aimed at reining in the unscrupulous practices of some for-profit college entities. In an effort to recruit students, some of these institutions rely on dishonest marketing, pressure tactics, and the falsifying of student aid information. Critics of these practices contend that many of these students default on their government backed loans in an attempt to gain, in some cases, essentially worthless degrees. Though well-intentioned, the Department’s regulations included many overreaching and potentially harmful rules that affect all colleges and universities, especially private Christian colleges. In last week’s Continuing Resolution (budget for the remaining fiscal year) passed by the House of Representatives, an amendment that would invalidate the [gainful employment](#) aspect of the regulations was adopted by a vote of 289 – 136. In a show of [bipartisan](#) support, 58 House Democrats including Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi joined the Republican effort to stop the implementation of this standard. Regrettably, the section most [troubling to Christian colleges and universities](#), the Program Integrity section which expands state authorization requirements and creates a federal definition of “credit hour,” was not be stopped by this effort. The Continuing Resolution is now in the Senate waiting further consideration.

Department of Justice Ordered Not to Defend DOMA

On Wednesday, Attorney General Eric Holder sent a three page [letter](#) to Congress explaining that the Department of Justice will [no longer defend](#) the Defense of Marriage Act ([DOMA](#)) in court. The letter stated that “after careful consideration,” President Obama decided to void section 3 of DOMA, a law signed by President Clinton in 1996. White House Spokesman Jay Carney acknowledged that the President is still undecided on a personal level on the issue of gay marriage, but he feels that there is no compelling reason to uphold the statute which he believes is unconstitutional. Section 3 of DOMA stipulates that marriage is between a man and a woman and absolves states from having to recognize same sex unions from other states who do recognize them. Currently, at least 37 states have their own version of DOMA. Countless polls have repeatedly found that the majority of Americans believe in the traditional view of marriage. Conservatives realize that marriage between a man and a woman is a God-ordained institution that has been a stabilizing force on society for centuries. The consequences of ignoring this fact result in a myriad of social problems. In an [interview](#), ACLJ President Jay Sekulow reasoned that a President should not arbitrarily decide to prohibit a Department from defending a law that is on the books. Furthermore, Sekulow said that this issue of gay marriage should be decided by the people in the states, not by the Judiciary or the Federal Government. Although this abdication of responsibility is disheartening, some [pundits](#) surmise that it may be a blessing in disguise, since the Department was doing an inadequate job defending cases since its directors did not agree with the definition of marriage as set forth in DOMA.

Hawaii Governor Signs Civil Union Legislation

Hawaii has become the seventh state to [allow civil unions](#) between same sex couples. Despite the fact that voters previously approved a state constitutional amendment that upheld the traditional view of marriage in 1998, state legislators have repeatedly introduced measures to overturn the amendment. Several bills reached former Governor Linda Lingle’s desk, but were all summarily vetoed by the two term governor. On Wednesday, current Governor Neil Abercrombie followed through on his campaign promise to recognize civil unions. Gay and lesbian couples in the Aloha State will now have the same rights, responsibilities and benefits as heterosexual couples. On the federal level, the government confers over 1,000 [rights](#) and benefits to heterosexual married couples, most of which address financial matters, family and medical leave options, and survivor benefits. The Hawaii Family Forum noted in a press release that “passage of this law is just a desperate and dishonest attempt to force same-sex 'marriage' on Hawaii because civil unions for same-sex couples were never the goal.” Gay advocates acknowledge that their ultimate goal is the legalization of same sex marriage but that it will take time to overcome that hurdle.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Race to the Top Losers Scramble to Keep Promises](#)

[Your Interview With Speaker Boehner](#)

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