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Above all, we must realize that no arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. It is a weapon our adversaries in today's world do not have.

Ronald Reagan

Wisconsin Teachers Union Stalemate Ends

The highly charged Wisconsin budget battle [stalemate](#) has ended with the Senate's passage of a standalone bill (approved by three non partisan legislative [agencies](#)) which effectively ends most of the [collective bargaining](#) right of public employees. The previous measure required the presence of at least one Democrat to meet the quorum requirements. All fourteen of the state's Democratic lawmakers fled the state to avoid voting on the controversial legislation. After almost three weeks of negotiations, rallies, sit-ins, and press coverage failed to produce a compromise, Senate Republicans passed the amended bill over the vehement objections of the lone Democrat present and an enraged gallery of [union](#) supporters. The bill now goes to the Assembly, and then to Governor Scott Walker for his signature. The much maligned governor has stood firm in his resolve to pass this part of his "budget repair" plan. State Senator Minority Leader Mark Miller (D) has promised that "they will take back their government." The state will be spending several million dollars to restore the statehouse grounds and capitol building where protestors rallied and slept over the past few weeks. State police had to physically remove several of the remaining protestors Thursday morning. Although grounds can be restored, it remains to be seen whether the wide rift that this crisis has exposed within the state can be repaired as the state attempts to move forward in the weeks ahead.

Teacher Preparation Accountability Initiative

Despite continued assertions by Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan that the Department is working to "decrease the size of the federal footprint" in education, the Administration is now advocating reform in the arena of teacher preparation accountability. According to [Education Week](#), this is the first "major foray into policy dealing with teacher education." The 2012 educational plan seeks to change the reporting requirements for universities that train educators. The model is an outcome-based approach that uses the progress of the student as an indicator of the effectiveness of the educator's college preparation. Approximately 185 million dollars has been requested for the "Presidential Teaching Fellowship" program. The program would award scholarship money to teaching candidates in states with DOE approved accountability standards. These accountability standards would identify which higher education institutions have "exemplary" programs and those which need improvement. The regulatory burden has increased significantly on higher education institutions since the late 1990's Title II requirements. Currently, schools are required to collect and submit an estimated 440 points of data concerning a wide array of information (background checks, fingerprinting, personality tests, etc.) The Department has acknowledged that the data burden needs to be reduced to the most important outcome measures. Teacher preparation programs would be evaluated by how much their alumni learned, length of teacher's tenure, and an evaluation by school districts of the quality of teachers produced by their program. College representatives, some of whom advocated greater accountability, have raised concerns about what entity (federal or state) would determine the criteria, how standards would be applied equally, and whether teacher efficacy should be based mainly on student performance. Congressional action would be required to authorize this program.

Defense of Marriage Update

In a [press release](#) this week, Speaker of the House John Boehner stated that the House Leadership believed that the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) "should be decided by the courts, rather than the President unilaterally." Furthermore, he announced that the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group has decided to

instruct the House General Counsel to assume the defense of marriage since the President has instructed the Department of Justice to abdicate its role. The Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group is composed of the Speaker, Majority and Minority Leaders, and the Majority and Minority Whips.

Maryland Ministers Oppose Same Sex Marriage Bill

Last week, the Maryland State Senate seemed poised to pass legislation that would recognize same sex marriage for legal purposes. Several organizations, such as the Family Research Council and the National Organization for Marriage, have waged [campaigns](#) raising awareness about the bill and its implications for family and marriage. In response to these appeals, African American [religious leaders](#) (particularly in Prince George's County, Maryland) and others have actively fought the bill's passage. According to the *Washington Post*, Prince George's County has "one of the most affluent and best educated majority black jurisdictions and is home to some of the nation's largest and most influential churches." These ministers were joined by Jewish and Catholic church leaders for a vigil on the state house grounds. At a meeting of the Collective Empowerment Group (about 150 pastors), all the members present voted unanimously to oppose the bill. Several of the ministers publicly reiterated that this fight is not rooted in hate or bigotry, but is a battle to preserve the biblical view that marriage is between a man and a woman. Also, the importance of the nuclear family on the [stability](#) of society as a whole has been at the forefront of the arguments against this current attempt to redefine marriage. Several legislators have changed their views in light of the intense public outcry and calls from their constituents. One delegate noted that her office received calls 25 to 1 against the measure. The absence of Delegates Jill Carter and Tiffany Alston, some of the bill's co-sponsors, at a scheduled Judiciary Committee vote last week halted the measure's progress. Later, Delegate Alston said that her constituents' [opinion](#) was not favorable and did not vote for the bill which she had supported previously. A final vote in the Senate is expected on Friday. If the bill passes, it could be debated in the House as early as next Wednesday.

House Education and Workforce Committee Hearing

On March 9, the Education and Workforce Committee held a hearing entitled "Budget and Policy Proposals of the US Department of Education" in which Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was the sole witness. The Secretary [highlighted](#) the Department's proposed reforms in the areas of charter schools and desire to gravitate toward a performance pay based system for teachers. He reiterated the need for increased funding to expand the Race to the Top program (competitive money awarded to states that formulate better educational models approved by the Department) to the district level and a renewed investment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Rep. Virginia Foxx [questioned](#) why the disparity between the substantial federal investments and success was so extensive. The negative [effects](#) of some aspects of No Child Left Behind were discussed along with a call for the Congress to address these issues in this session. Rep. Walberg questioned the Secretary on matters important to faith-based schools, presenting the concern over how the agency's recent regulations for higher education would affect private, faith-based colleges and also expressed concern for maintaining protections for the autonomy and mission of faith-based preschools in the push for expanded early education programs. Although the current budget plan consolidates 38 programs into 11, the actual revenue request of 90 billion dollars is 31% higher than it was two years ago. During the questioning, Chairman John Klein [disputed](#) the Secretary's forecast of purported savings as a budgetary gimmick that was calculated by dividing the spending into two categories (non-Pell discretionary spending and Pell grant spending) instead of one. Secretary Duncan acknowledged the existence of duplicative programs and continuing efforts to eliminate wasteful and duplicative spending. Chairman Kline stated that while "winning the future is a goal we all share,...it cannot be won through record breaking spending." To watch the archived webcast [click here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Rhode Island Public School Defends Prayer Banner](#)

[Supreme Court Rejects Appeal About Student Fees](#)

[Taxing Church Attendance?](#)



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