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Material possessions, winning scores, and great reputations are meaningless in the eyes of the Lord, because He knows what we really are and that is all that matters.

John Wooden

School Choice Bill Passes U.S. House of Representatives

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives voted [225 - 195](#) to pass [H.R. 471](#) (the “Scholarship for Opportunity and Results Act,” or “SOAR”). The SOAR Act [reauthorizes](#) the successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program (DCOSP) which previously awarded scholarships to low income children allowing them to attend the schools of their choice, including private schools. In 2009, the Democrats in Congress defunded the program despite its positive results. Since that time no new students have been accepted into the program, but enrolled students were allowed to graduate. Speaker of the House John Boehner, who formerly served as the Chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, has affirmed that the SOAR Act is the only bill that he will sponsor this session. Furthermore, he noted that President Obama can demonstrate his willingness to work together on education reform “by saving this successful, [bipartisan](#) program that has helped so many underprivileged children to get a quality education.” According to findings from the 2007–2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress report, the District’s fourth graders rank 51st in the nation in reading and math scores. In comparison, enrollees of the DCOSP have a 90% graduation rate, while their public school counterparts have a 56% graduation rate. Parents have repeatedly testified before Congress in a concerted effort to save the program that has enabled their children to improve academically in a safe environment. The SOAR Act is based on a three sector approach that distributes money not only to the DCOSP but also to D.C. public and charter schools. In addition, the SOAR Act would actually reduce spending by approximately 15 million dollars. Individual scholarships award up to \$8,000 per year for elementary students and a maximum of \$12,000 per year for high school students. Proponents argue that the scholarships will save taxpayers money since the D.C. public school system currently spends over \$14,594 per pupil [annually](#). Furthermore, the SOAR Act seeks to make improvements to the program including stricter financial accountability measures for participating schools, clearer outlined requirements for participating schools, caps on program administration expenses, and provisions for a comprehensive assessment of the program’s success. Assessment indicators include evaluation of parental satisfaction, comparisons of OSP recipients versus their peers, school safety checks, and standardized testing scores that will be reported to federal agencies and parents. Although 74% of D.C. residents support the program, the D.C. government is divided on the issue. [Critics](#) of the proposal say that they oppose any bill that would decrease funding for the public school system. In a press release, Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline released a [statement praising](#) the SOAR Act. Senator Joe Lieberman has introduced a companion [bill](#) in the Senate. The Administration issued a statement of administrative policy opposing the SOAR Act but did not explicitly say that the president would [veto](#) the bill.

“Unplanned” — Pro-Life Ad Campaign

Pro-life advocates are hoping to build on the momentum provided by the Live Action undercover [videos](#) to defund Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest [abortion](#) provider. The [Susan B Anthony List](#) is sponsoring a \$90,000 dollar television advertising campaign in the Washington, D.C., area featuring former Planned Parenthood clinic director, Abby Johnson. Johnson has become a leading spokesperson for the pro-life movement and has recently written a book, titled *Unplanned: The Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader’s Eye-Opening Journey Across the Life Line*, about her disturbing experiences as a clinic

director. In the book, she outlines how she was urged by her superiors to increase the number of abortions performed at the facility. Her experiences clearly illustrate that the main focus of the clinics is to provide abortions, in spite of repeated claims that they provide low income women with critical medical information and health screenings. One of the [television advertisements](#) effectively refutes the oft repeated claim that Planned Parenthood clinics provide greater access to women's health services by showing a caller contacting numerous Planned Parenthood clinics who all inform her that they do not provide the medical screening and offer a referral. In the House of Representatives, Congressman Mike Pence, along with 122 co-sponsors has [introduced](#) H.R. 217, the "Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act," in an effort to end the taxpayer subsidizing of all abortion providers. Last year, Planned Parenthood received 363 million dollars from federal funds and performed over 324,000 abortions. Rep. Pence recently authored an [essay](#) responding to criticisms that this legislation will keep women from receiving essential healthcare services. To view the "Unplanned" television ad [click here](#).

Florida Teacher Tenure Reform Law Passed

This week, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed Senate Bill 736 that ended tenure for the state's public school teachers and instituted a new merit-based pay [system](#). Under the new law, which goes into effect July 1, 2014, teachers' contracts will now be issued on an annual basis, eliminating tenure. Administrators will be able to fire ineffective teachers at the end of each school year. The "last in, first out" policy that many school districts operated under has also been eliminated by this measure. Governor Scott argued that the previous hiring policy resulted in the retention of incompetent teachers solely because of tenure, while great educators were laid off unfairly. State legislators say that this will allow principals greater freedom when making hiring decisions. "When you make the decision to place a chronically ineffective teacher in a classroom, you've decided a teacher's property rights to a job is more important than a child's constitutional right to an education," opines State Senator Don Gaetz, adding that it's "immoral." Science and math teachers will receive higher compensation since those content areas are consistently hard to staff adequately. Current teachers will be able to stay under the old system or opt to join the new plan which may result in higher pay in some instances. The Florida Teachers Education Association (the state's largest teachers union) led the vocal opposition to the bill during the debate at the state house. The union [alleges](#) that the law represents an unfunded mandate and is an attack on educators. The state will have to develop tests in order to measure the teacher's effectiveness and determine their compensation. Teachers' evaluations will now be based on student achievement outcomes as well as peer reviews. *Education Week's* Quality Counts rates [Florida fifth overall](#) in the nation in educational quality.

Senate Resolution 99 – Safeguarding Against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) has reintroduced [S. Res. 99](#) to oppose the United States ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#)). In 1989, the United Nations adopted the CRC which effectively elevates children's rights over parents' rights. Former Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeline Albright signed the CRC on the behalf of the United States in 1995. However, treaties such as the CRC require a 2/3 vote in the Senate for ratification. Although 193 [nations](#) have signed this treaty, there has never been enough support in the Senate to ensure passage. Senate Resolution 99 would bar passage of this treaty during the 112th Congress. To read the full text of the United Nations documents [click here](#). To view a summary of the effects of the CRC [click here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

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

[German Christian Parents Jailed for Keeping Children Out of Objectionable Class](#)

[Corporal Punishment Controversy](#)

