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Students Losing Health Insurance Options

Several Christian colleges will drop student plans to avoid complying with mandate to provide contraceptive and abortifacient drugs

By Leigh Jones

(WNS)--Students at several Christian colleges will no longer be able to buy health insurance from their schools thanks to new government rules that require coverage to include access to contraceptives, sterilization procedures and abortifacient drugs.

The schools, which have moral objections to providing the drugs, have decided to stop offering student health plans to avoid the mandate.

Administrators at Franciscan University, a small Catholic college in Steubenville, Ohio, announced earlier this week they would drop coverage for students rather than participate in a plan that requires them "to violate the consistent teachings of the Catholic Church on the sacredness of human life."

Officials at Colorado Christian University, a nondenominational school in Lakewood, Colo., plan to drop student health coverage for the 2013-14 year if the school doesn't prevail in its lawsuit against the federal government. CCU is one of several schools that filed suit over the mandate, which applies to both student and employee insurance plans. University Spokesman Ron Benton said offering insurance coverage under the new federal guidelines "would be inconsistent with our deeply held religious beliefs."

The school will offer its existing student plan for the 2012-13 school year, under a one-year opt-out option that allows religious institutions to postpone complying with the new regulations, Benton said.
About 4,200 students attend CCU. Benton could not immediately say how many students purchase health insurance from the school. Fewer than 200 of Franciscan's 2,500 students get their insurance from the college.

Under the new rules implemented in the health care law passed in 2010, all health insurance must provide coverage for birth control, sterilization and the "morning after" pill, which can prevent a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus. The federal government provided an exception to the rule for churches, but Christian schools, organizations and companies must comply.

Belmont Abbey College, a Catholic university in North Carolina, became the first school to file suit over the mandate in November. CCU filed its suit a month later. In February, Louisiana College, in Pineville, La., Geneva College, in Beaver Falls, Pa., and Ave Maria University, in Naples, Fla., filed suit as well. Several other Christian organizations and one family-owned business also filed lawsuits, claiming the regulations require them to violate their religious beliefs.

But the U.S. Supreme Court could overturn the legislation before any of the school suits reach the lower courts. In March, the justices heard three days of oral arguments in a case filed against the government by 26 states and the National Federation of Independent Business. They are expected to issue a ruling in June or July.

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**Biola Clarifies Stance on Human Sexuality**

After an underground gay group came out, the Christian school assures support to students struggling with same-sex attraction

By Angela Lu

(WNS)--Less than a week after President Barack Obama announced his support for gay marriage, a small group of gay Biola University students came out on the La Miranda, Calif., campus. Flyers posted around the campus lawn announced the presence of the previously underground group, which does not have official recognition at the Christian school.

School officials had the flyers removed almost immediately. But the next day, they issued a statement clarifying the school's stance on human sexuality and assuring students struggling with same-sex attraction that they are welcome in the Biola community.

"In the coming academic year, we will have focused dialogue and campus-wide educational forums on human sexuality," Biola President Barry Corey wrote in a letter to students, faculty and alumni. "Biola sees this as an opportunity to live out what it means to be a learning community of grace and love."
School administrators decided to write the statement a year and a half ago, but only released it after The Biola Queer Underground—an anonymous group that claims to have a few dozen members—posted its flyers and made its website public. The site, which includes the stories of the group's members, although they are not named, questions the school's views on homosexuality.

Biola students are required to sign a contract affirming their agreement with the university's belief that "sexual relationships are designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between husband and wife." The new statement goes into more detail, looking at God's design for marriage, offering help for those struggling with issues of sexuality, and encouraging discussion on campus.

"Our marriages on earth model the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church (Eph 5:31-33)," the statement reads. "God's design for marriage and sexuality is the foundational reason for viewing acts of sexual intimacy between a man and a woman outside of marriage, and any act of sexual intimacy between two persons of the same sex, as illegitimate moral options for the confessing Christian."

The statement also says the school is a safe place for those struggling with same sex issues: "We pledge to extend compassion and care, providing accountability and assistance as we support all members of our community -- students, staff and faculty -- in their desire to live consistently with Christian teaching."

Westmont College, in Montecito, Calif., had to tackle similar issues last year when 31 gay alumni wrote an open letter to the school describing their "doubt, loneliness and fear" during their time as students.

While the school did not change its policy, the letter spurred a week-long series of events to promote discussion about sexuality, including faculty panels, chapel sessions, and discussion groups.

Chris Grace, vice president of Student Development, said that students often come to him and other Biola faculty members about their struggles with same-sex attraction.

"They struggle in ways like everyone else because of brokenness," he said. "When we recognize students who come to us, our hope is to walk alongside them... to help them grow closer to what God intended in their lives." Many of these students who have come to the school for help have disassociated themselves with the Underground group, he said.

But for those who blatantly disagree with the school's theological view and act against its policy, "we will live in a state of tension," Grace said. If they persist, even after conversations with the faculty, the students will be violating their signed contract. In that case, Grace tells them: "This isn't the place for you."

With gay marriage a hot button topic around the nation, Grace predicts that all Christian universities will have to deal with issues of sexual identity on campus.
"I believe it will be one of the big defining issues in our culture....it will be a big issue for Christian colleges to be clear on what they believe and seek clarity and compassion to treat others with respect."

California Senate Looks at Ban on Reparative Therapy

The bill prohibits reparative therapy for minors and forces adults to sign a form stating it's possibly dangerous

By Angela Lu

(WNS)--A bill banning reparative therapy - a counseling method that tries to help a person change sexual orientations - passed its final Senate committee Tuesday. But opponents say the bill unconstitutionally prohibits speech, violates privacy rights, and creates unintended consequences.

The bill would prohibit reparative therapy for minors and force adults to sign a release form stating that the counseling is ineffectual and possibly dangerous.

The bill's author, Sen. Ted Lieu, D-Torrance, called reparative therapy "scientifically ineffective" and responsible for causing a number of ills, including "extreme depression and guilt" that sometimes leads to suicide.

"Some therapists are taking advantage of vulnerable people by pushing dangerous sexual orientation-change efforts," Lieu said.

But Pacific Justice Institute claims the ban is unconstitutional because it takes the unprecedented step of prohibiting an entire category of speech between therapists and minor patients. Not only does the bill take away professional therapists' right to free speech, "it also overrides the freedom of young adults and their families to access information and opinions that may differ from state orthodoxy," said PJI Attorney Matthew McReynolds.

In the case of adult patients, the bill's requirement of signed consent forms compels speech by forcing therapists to read statements they do not agree with and "treats adult patients as though they are unintelligent" for choosing this type of therapy, McReynolds contests.

The bill also promotes the belief that "gender is changeable, but sexual orientation is not," as none of the legislation bans transgender counseling.

Organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association and American Psychiatric Association have long opposed reparative therapy,
insisting there is nothing wrong with homosexuality. But none have gone as far as banning the therapy.

On a larger scale, McReynolds sees the bill's passage as giving more power to the government over the family. The bill calls "family rejection" of sexual orientation a "serious" health risk for minors and gives the state a compelling interest to protect kids from health risks and concerns. "If you put the two together, you'll soon see states yanking kids out of homes where the family is anything less than supportive and embracing of their sexual orientation," McReynolds said.

Gay rights activists hope a ban like this one could inspire similar legislation in other states. But PJI believes the bill is blatantly unconstitutional and won't make it through the California Senate and Assembly.

The full Senate likely will take up the bill next month.

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New York Senate Passes Bill Closing Child Porn Loophole

(WNS)--The New York State Senate passed a bill May 15 making it illegal to view child pornography, in response to a recent court ruling that said simply looking at such content — but not printing or saving it — is legal.

The bill makes it a felony to “knowingly access with intent to view any obscene performance which includes sexual conduct by a child less than sixteen years of age.”


The bill now moves to the General Assembly, where it is expected to gain approval.

In its May 8 ruling, the New York Court of Appeals tossed out two child-pornography counts against a former college professor because the judges didn’t consider viewing such content on a computer to be the same as possession.

McGuire said society is pushing for more access to pornography amid an absence of community standards. For example, he said, libraries are no longer safe for children because patrons can use computers to view pornography in the open.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that 15 states have made viewing child pornography a crime after similar court decisions.
Anti-Christian Activist Mikey Weinstein Strikes (out) Again

(WNS)--A Texas judge has ruled that "imprecatory" prayers, or prayers for another person's harm, are legal so long as they don't result in direct threats or personal damage. Mikey Weinstein, a Jewish agnostic and founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, sued Gordon Klingenschmitt, a former Navy chaplain, whose website allegedly called on supporters to claim Psalm 109 in prayers for Weinstein's demise. District Court Judge Martin Hoffman dismissed Weinstein's lawsuit, but Weinstein, a former Air Force lawyer who served in the Reagan White House, said that "a very aggressive appeal" of the decision was "highly likely." In 2005 Weinstein sued the Air Force Academy for allowing Christian "proselytization," and in 2007 charged the Pentagon for allowing lunchtime Bible studies to take place on its premises.

Beware Blasphemy in Kuwait

(WNS)--Kuwait's parliament on May 3 passed a law making blasphemy punishable by death and broadening the definition for the offense. Under it, cursing Allah, the prophet Muhammad, his wives, other key Islamic figures, or the Quran became capital offenses. The Gulf nation and U.S. ally has a majority Muslim population, with about 14 percent Christians—many of them expatriate workers.

Putin a No-Show at G-8

(WNS)--Russian President Vladimir Putin began his third term as president by snubbing his Western counterpart, President Barack Obama. Putin decided to be a no-show at a May 18-19 summit of the Group of Eight nations—a first since Russia was invited to join the G-8 in 1998—saying the United States had "nothing to propose." Putin let it be known that Obama's criticism of Russian elections plus lack of progress on a missile defense shield were reasons to stay home.

Is Death Penalty Dying?

(WNS)--The campaign to abolish the death penalty is getting new life. On Apr. 25, Gov. Dannel Malloy, a Democrat, signed a bill repealing the death penalty in Connecticut. A separate proposal has qualified for the November ballot in California that would shut down the largest death row in the country and convert inmates' sentences to life without parole. A new study by the National Research Council said there have been no reliable studies to show that capital punishment is a deterrent to homicide. And last fall a Gallup Poll found support for the death penalty had slipped to 61 percent nationally, the lowest level in 39 years. Even Texas is having second thoughts: the state's 13 executions in 2011 marked the lowest number in 15 years. Among the reasons for the shift in attitude is cost. According to Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti, the current system is "obscenely expensive." According to USA Today, "In the past 34 years in California, just 13 people have been executed as part of a system that costs $184 million per year to maintain."