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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Catholics at the Capitol 2007 Attracts New Faces

On March 13, 2007, over 370 Catholics from across Wisconsin gathered in Madison to attend *Catholics at the Capitol 2007*. A biennial event that coincides with the beginning of each legislative session, *Catholics at the Capitol* provides a forum for the faithful to engage in public policy education, spiritual expression, and legislative advocacy. Sponsored by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference and other Catholic organizations around the state, this unique event allows Catholics to publicly illustrate what it means to be a faithful citizen.



Catholic Herald-Madison photos by Kathleen Bushman.

The fourth *Catholics at the Capitol* was the largest ever with Catholics from all five dioceses and beyond participating in this year's event. Many of the participants stated they continue to return to this event because of the fellowship they experience in attending.

"Anytime you come together like this, it's energizing," said

Wisconsin Catholic Conference Executive Director, John Huebscher. "People catch the spirit and reinforce each other. You get ideas from others on

effective advocacy that can be taken back and used in the parish."

The day's events started with the Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison, presiding over the Morning Prayer Service. Spiritual formation was followed by policy education as participants attended breakout sessions devoted to Catholic social teaching, parish and student advocacy, the 2007

Farm Bill, homelessness, and criminal justice and health care reform.

The morning session was followed by an inspirational keynote address given by Deirdre McQuade, spokesperson for the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. Ms. McQuade spoke on initiating

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

I once read there are three ways to be influential.

One is to be rich enough to bribe.

A second is to be powerful enough to bully.

A third is to be principled enough to inspire.

It is this last attribute that explains whatever influence the Church enjoys in public policy debates. The principles that are the bedrock of our influence in the Capitol are grounded in our Catholic faith and its social teaching.

But it always helps when others give voice and witness to those same principles.

That is why our legislative day, *Catholics at the Capitol*, is so important. For the presence of those who attend puts a human face on those principles. And their advocacy amplifies the voice of the Conference.

The 2007 edition of *Catholics at the Capitol* modeled what we strive to be. Over 370 Catholics, our largest turnout to date, spent time together to revisit those principles in our breakout sessions and our large assemblies. They also reaffirmed each other in their time together at lunch and throughout the day.

The active presence of Archbishop Dolan and Bishop Morlino in sessions with youth and politicians gave witness to their support of the Conference and all Catholics who influence public policy.

At the end of the day, the two visited with legislators and the Governor in support of a Catholic agenda devoted to the dignity of human life and the common good of all people. They did not bully. They did not offer campaign donations. But they did inspire by the quiet dignity of their example. And their "civil discourse" helped to elevate the debate.

It is difficult to overstate how much our biennial *Catholics at the Capitol* gatherings boost the staff morale and inspires us to do the work we do on behalf of the Church. We are grateful to all who attended. We look forward to welcoming them – and others – to our 2009 Legislative Day.

2007 Budget Process Underway

Governor Jim Doyle presented his two-year budget on February 13th, and the next day, the Joint Committee on Finance introduced the 2007 Executive Budget Act (SB 40) on his behalf. Like all budgets, this one is currently being reviewed by the legislature and will continue to be debated over the next several months. The following provides a brief summary of budget items that the WCC is monitoring:

Education

The budget modifies how the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is financed and reduces the Milwaukee property taxpayer's contribution. It also collects a fee from all choice schools to fund a fiscal auditor for the program. The budget also proposes a 50% increase in the state's reimbursement rate for school breakfast.

Corrections

SB 40 creates an Earned Release Review Commission for non-violent felons who have served 75% of their sentence. It provides \$1 million and \$750,000 respectively for Project New Hope and the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) programs in Milwaukee. The budget also creates a Truth-in-Sentencing Commission and provides \$3.4 million for the Taycheedah women's facility.

Medicaid

The budget contains a number of initiatives designed to extend health care to underserved populations. It expands the BadgerCare Plus and Family Care programs, and extends Medicaid coverage for foster care youths.

Children and Families

This budget assists single, childless women in the Wisconsin Works program (W-2) that cannot work due to an at-risk pregnancy, and extends the period that single parents of newborns in W-2 may stay home after their child's birth. Under this budget, an affordable housing trust fund is created and foreign-born persons gain access to in-state tuition once they meet certain conditions and provide proof that they intend to apply for a visa. Homeless shelters will also receive an additional \$1 million in funding.

Treat 17-Year Olds as Juveniles

Since 1995, 17-year-olds in Wisconsin have been considered adults in criminal cases, making ours one of only 13 states in the nation to incarcerate adolescents with adult offenders. In 2004, almost 5,000 17-year-olds were sent to adult jails, while 147 were placed in adult prisons. Eighty-seven percent of those sent to jail were convicted of non-violent crimes — mostly drug and alcohol offenses and disorderly conduct.

Recent research on adolescent brain development reveals that the adolescent brain is significantly different from the adult brain. The areas of the brain that affect impulse control and behavioral regulation have not fully developed in adolescents and this helps to explain why adolescents are more prone to risk-taking and dangerous behavior. In light of this new research, it makes sense to treat adolescent offenders differently than adults.

Although it costs almost three times as much to treat an adolescent in the juvenile justice system than in the adult justice system, there is a notable savings in the long run. Children held in juvenile correctional facilities have lower recidivism rates than those held in adult jails and prisons; and if they do re-offend, they are less likely to commit more serious crimes in the future. Juvenile criminals also do not face the long-term consequences that adult criminals do, such as being prohibited from receiving federal financial aid for higher education, facing housing and employment discrimination because of a criminal conviction, or being listed on CCAP, a public website of accused and convicted criminals. In short, a person with a juvenile criminal record is more likely to get an education, find a job and live a responsible life as an adult.

More Funds for Wisconsin Shares

When Wisconsin Works (W-2) was first launched over a decade ago, the Wisconsin Shares program was established to serve *all* eligible low-income families in need of childcare. Its intention was to help parents stay off public assistance and become part of the state's workforce. The program has been a success and there are no waiting lists. Moreover, total General Purpose Revenue (GPR) spending on childcare is considerably lower than a decade ago.

Currently, about 95 per cent of families receiving Wisconsin Shares are composed of a single parent and two children. About 79 percent of these families have annual incomes below \$24,000. Over 56,000 children are helped every month.

Because federal funding has remained stagnant and demand for the program is growing, Wisconsin Shares is now running a deficit. To remedy this, the Governor's budget proposes to make several changes to the program: 1) reduce eligibility for the program; 2) increase parent co-payment requirements; 3) freeze payment rates to providers; 4) adjust payment policies related to child absences; 5) and establish waiting lists.

The net effect of these proposed changes will be to make child care less available and more expensive for poor parents and to discourage higher quality daycare centers from accepting children living in poverty.

The WCC joins other advocacy groups in urging citizens to contact their legislators and ask them to fund Wisconsin Shares fully. Like other programs targeted to the needy, Wisconsin Shares helps make it possible for citizens living in poverty to support their families and participate more fully in the life of the community.

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pro-life advocacy from the perspective of Jesus, who always demonstrated compassion, respect, and generosity for those whose statements and actions were contrary to His own.

When asked what attendees would take home from the day, Ms. McQuade said, "I hope they're encouraged by seeing so many like-minded people who are concerned about shaping the political life; concerned about helping to bring our beautiful Catholic teaching to bear on political decision-making, but that it wouldn't stop here. That it could go home and have a ripple effect — on our families, our parishes, and diocesan work."

A discussion of life issues continued in one of several afternoon breakout sessions. Other topics of discussion for the afternoon session included

immigration, poverty, predatory lending practices, long term care reform, and a special session on the services and mission of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.



Former Milwaukee District Attorney E. Michael McCann, Bishop Morlino of Madison, Former Lieutenant Governor Margaret Farrow, and Archbishop Dolan of Milwaukee discuss the role of faith in politics at the closing session for *Catholics at the Capitol 2007*.

Catholic Herald-Madison photos by Kathleen Bushman

The day ended with a new legislative day feature, a panel discussion on "Interacting with Politicians." Panelists included the Most Reverend Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of Milwaukee, Bishop Morlino of Madison, former Lieutenant Governor, Margaret Farrow, and former Milwaukee County District Attorney, E. Michael McCann. Tom Heinen of

the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel moderated a spirited discussion that explored the challenges politicians, bishops, and others face when assessing the role of faith in public policy formation.

At the day's end, many of those present visited the Capitol to lobby lawmakers on WCC legislative priorities. Stem cell research, criminal justice reform, access to health care, and concerns about the biennial budget were all identified as policy priorities for the 2007-08 legislative session.

"We try to use this event as a way of setting the tone for a legislative session that is just getting started," said Huebscher, "and to remind everyone of the Catholic presence in Wisconsin. We call attention to the fact that there is a relationship between what we, as Catholics, say regarding public policy and the process itself."