

CAPITOL

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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Health Care to Be Major Issue in 2007

As we reported in our Fall 2005 issue, pressures to reform and extend health care coverage continue to mount nationwide.

Here in Wisconsin, where the percentage of our population lacking health insurance is among the lowest in the nation, that goal is very much in reach.

And it may become even closer in 2007. Consider these factors:

Both the Governor and the new majority in the State Senate have signaled their intent to make access to health care a priority. In fact, the new legislature is expected to consider as many as three separate proposals to broaden health care coverage. Each has the backing of key "stakeholders."

In addition, a plan to increase the cigarette tax by \$1 a pack to generate over \$250 million a year to fund Medicaid and other health care initiatives enjoys broad support and editorial endorsement from many of Wisconsin's daily newspapers.

This renewed emphasis on

access to health care is good news in terms of the WCC's public policy agenda, according to WCC Executive Director John Huebscher.

"Access to health care is something we try to bring up every session in one way or another," he noted. "It was one of the

questions on our candidate questionnaire and a major issue in many legislative races. The Governor and

legislators seem to be listening."

Huebscher noted that expanding affordable health insurance touches upon three of the "Moral Priorities for Public Life" identified in the statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*.

"Lack of affordable health care is a major reason women choose abortion," he observed. "In this context, improving access to health care fosters the goal of protecting human life and is very much a life issue."

Improving access to health care fosters the goal of protecting human life.

Winter 2007
Vol. 2007 No. 1

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

The beginning of the odd-numbered year is the time when the WCC refines its public policy agenda for the upcoming legislative session.

The work of defining the policy agenda for 2007-08 began shortly after the end of the 2006 legislative session. Like any organization, the WCC assesses the legislative output of the past session and determines which issues are likely to resurface. The staff also assesses whether diocesan offices identified any new issues or problems that might need legislative attention in the future.

The staff measures the issues identified in this process against the "Moral Priorities for Public Life" identified in the USCCB Statement on Political Responsibility and used by the bishops of Wisconsin as the framework for the WCC policy agenda. These priorities are:

1) Protecting Human Life, 2) Preserving Family and Community, 3) Promoting Social Justice, and 4) Practicing Global Solidarity.

In the fall of 2006, staff shared a draft agenda with the leaders of various diocesan offices and the WCC's Policy Advisory Group. The bishops reviewed a preliminary draft of the agenda at their October meeting.

Late fall and early winter are devoted to refining the draft agenda and additional consultations. Staff must also make its own judgments as to how likely it is that an issue will be seriously considered in the new legislature.

Staff presents the final recommendations to the bishops at the February 2007 meeting of the WCC Board of Directors for their review and approval.

Even then, the agenda is not necessarily final. Any agenda is approved with the full understanding that changing events and unforeseen circumstances may require some adaptations.

But those plans are easier to adapt because we lay a foundation that is true to Catholic teaching and the

WCC Launches New E-Advocacy Tool

As the new legislative session opens, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference will unveil a new e-advocacy tool designed to help Catholics across the state track the legislative session and connect with their elected officials.

The new tool, which will be accessible through the www.wisconsinatholic.org website as of the end of January 2007 will include:

- A listing of current state public policy proposals of interest;
- A sign-up page inviting visitors to register for the WCC advocacy network to receive e-newsletters and e-alerts from the WCC;
- A tool that allows individual visitors to quickly look up their own federal, state, and local elected officials;
- Current e-alerts from the WCC and an easy email system that allows visitors to take quick action and send their legislator an email on issues of interest.

"This new advocacy tool will help build on the e-communications that we have grown over the past several years," observed John Huebscher, WCC Executive Director. "The Internet has really changed the way that we receive and share information about public policy developments and opened up new opportunities for individuals to connect directly with their elected officials."

In recent years, the WCC has provided an e-newsletter delivered bimonthly during each legislative session. While that newsletter provides interested Catholics across the state with a snapshot of the activity of the legislature, it does not facilitate easy "action" on current issues of interest or concern. However, the new e-advocacy tool, provided through Capitol Advantage (Capwiz), enables subscribers to become active participants in the legislative process. The service allows members to specify areas of particular interest and easily key into developments at the state and federal level.

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2007-08 Legislative Calendar at a Glance

A first order of business for any new legislature is to set its calendar for the upcoming two years. The scheduling resolution for the 2007-08 session was approved on the session's opening day.

The key dates for any session are the "floor periods," or those days when the two houses meet to vote on bills and amendments. As in past years, the floor periods are set at intervals between January of the odd-numbered year and spring of the even numbered year when the legislature concludes its work in advance of the election campaigns.

Floor periods vary in length from one day to several weeks. With rare exceptions, they include only Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week. The major floor periods for 2007-08 are as follows:

2007

January 30 - February 1
February 20 - March 1
March 13 - 15
April 17 - 26
May 8 - 17
May 29 - June 29
September 18 - 20
October 23 - November 8
December 11 - 13

2008

January 15 - 31
February 19 - March 13
May 6 - 8
May 27 - 28

New E-Advocacy Tool, from page 2

More important, the tool provides a quick two-step process to take action on a bill or issue of interest. The system allows users to produce an email or letter for delivery to an individual's own representatives. "The central value of a tool like Capwiz is the easy connection that it establishes between constituents and their legislators. Visitors can generate an email through our website and it arrives in their legislator's email box looking just like any other personal email from a constituent."

Subscribers to the *WCC Capitol Update* will be automatically enrolled in the e-advocacy network. New visitors to the site will be able to sign up to receive alerts and e-newsletters once the site fully launches by the end of January 2007. For more information go to www.wisconsincatholic.org or contact the WCC office.



Catholics at the Capitol 2007 Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Refer to enclosed registration materials

or

visit our website

www.wisconsincatholic.org

Registration deadline: February 23, 2007

CAPITOL REPORT is published quarterly by the WCC to inform Catholics and policy decision makers of the WCC's position on state and federal legislation and other WCC activities. Subscriptions are \$5 per calendar year.

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Health Care Issue, from page 1

So many of those who lack health care are among the working poor or other economically vulnerable groups. Consequently, access to health care is also a matter of promoting social justice—another of the moral priorities.

Finally, paying for health care places major strains on families. On the one hand, its cost strains family budgets. On the other hand, because access to health care is so often based on employment, many parents of young children who would prefer to be home with their children feel compelled to remain in the

workforce. “To the extent we can make health insurance available to all, we can advance the priority of preserving families and community,” Huebscher added.

It is too early to tell how and when the legislature will address the major plans for reforming

health care. Issues related to Medicaid and expanding BadgerCare will likely be debated in the State Budget that must be enacted by July 1, 2007. More comprehensive reform may be considered later in the year.

In the past, the WCC has not endorsed a specific proposal for expanding health insurance. However, it has urged lawmakers and others to evaluate any proposal in light of the general principles for healthcare reform enumerated by the U.S. Bishops (see box).

Want to Learn More About Health Care Principles and Plans?

USCCB Principles for Health Care Reform:
www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/brochure1.pdf

Wisconsin Health Security Act:
www.wisconsinhealth.org/wiplan.html

Wisconsin Health Care Partnership Plan:
www.wisaficio.org

Wisconsin Health Plan:
www.wisconsinhealthproject.org/plan.index.htm

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