

# CAPITOL

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# REPORT



The Newsletter of the  
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

## Bishops Renew Call for Religious Liberty

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has renewed its call for Catholics across the United States to urge Congress and the Obama Administration to protect religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

The bishops noted that they "have long supported access to life-affirming healthcare for all, and the conscience rights of everyone involved in the complex process of providing that healthcare."

It was this commitment to religious liberty that led them to raise two serious objections to the preventive services regulation issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in August 2011.

First, the bishops objected to the rule mandating that private health plans cover sterilization and contraception, including drugs that may cause abortion. The bishops called for the mandate's rescission.

Second, the bishops urged that if HHS insisted on keeping the mandate, it provide a conscience

exemption for all stakeholders who consider such "services" immoral, not just the extremely small subset of "religious employers" that HHS proposed to exempt initially.

Under the HHS regulation, the definition of religious employer applies only to churches and other organizations that primarily employ or serve members of their own faith. Such a definition would exclude health care institutions, charitable agencies, and colleges and universities.

"If religious liberty means anything, it means the ability of a faith community to define what is and is not a part of it," said Archbishop Jerome Listecki. "The government has no right to substitute its judgment for that of the Church on that question."

"We will therefore continue — with no less vigor, no less sense of urgency — our efforts to correct this problem through the other two branches of government...And we renew our call to the Catholic faithful, and to all our fellow Americans, to join together in this effort to protect religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all."

*See page 3 for additional information on this issue.*

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## Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

A veteran observer of the Capitol scene likes to remind us that "the status quo is no accident; somebody put it there." The adage conveys the wisdom that those before us influence how we live and work today, and why we should hope they exercise good judgment when putting the status quo in place.

So much of what the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) is today was defined by its first Executive Director, Charles (Chuck) Phillips, who passed way last month (*see page 4*).

Chuck's twenty-three-year tenure at the WCC defined its formative years. With Archbishop Cousins and Bishops O'Donnell, Freking, Wycislo, and Hammes, Chuck laid the foundation for the WCC's structure, processes, and the way in which it expressed the Catholic presence at the Capitol and in the public square generally.

At Chuck's retirement dinner in 1992, Archbishop Weakland recalled the insight Archbishop Cousins shared with him when, as a new Archbishop, he assumed the role of President of the WCC. "Chuck is a steady hand," Cousins told him. "And you will always be able to trust his judgment."

Archbishop Cousins had it right. Chuck Phillips was blessed with good judgment. The WCC was always well represented when he spoke on its behalf. He led by example and impressed on all of us as staff the importance of doing our homework so that the bishops were well prepared on the issues presented to them at the WCC Board meetings.

None of us live forever and no status quo persists without some change. But in having Chuck Phillips lay the foundation during its first two decades, the WCC was much blessed.

Well done, Chuck!



## WCC Backs Credits for Families

The WCC has lent its support to legislation to create a nonrefundable income tax credit for adoption expenses. Assembly Bill 287, authored by Representative Kathy Bernier (R-Chippewa Falls), permits a taxpayer to claim a credit of up to \$5,000 for any amounts exceeding that claimed by the taxpayer under a similar federal tax credit.

Associate Director Barbara Sella presented WCC testimony to the Assembly Committee on Children and Families on January 11.

"One does not have to be affluent in order to be a good parent. Yet, too often a certain level of affluence is necessary in order to afford adoption," Sella argued. "A tax credit such as this can make the process far more affordable for those families who open up their hearts and their homes to children born both domestically and abroad."

Sella also noted that it was important to foster policies that help birth parents find stable, loving homes for their children if they cannot raise the children themselves.

The Department of Revenue estimates that about 150 persons would be eligible for the credit. AB 287 has yet to be considered by the full Assembly.

On February 9, the WCC also submitted testimony to the Assembly Education Committee in support of a proposal, Assembly Bill 466 (Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt, R-Fond du lac), which allows individuals to claim a state income tax deduction for amounts contributed to a Coverdell Education Savings Account (CESA). Distributions from a CESA may be used for qualified education expenses incurred at an eligible education institution, be it public or private, for a beneficiary up to age 30.

"Under AB 466, families of modest incomes can lessen their tax burden and alleviate some of the fiscal barriers that may prevent a student from furthering his or her education," explained WCC Associate Director Kim Wadas. "Also, this bill continues to recognize the common contribution made by all educational institutions, public or private."

## Six Things Everyone Should Know About HHS Mandate

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops offers the following clarifications regarding the Health and Human Services (HHS) regulation on mandatory coverage of contraceptives, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs.

1) The mandate does not exempt Catholic charities, schools, universities, or hospitals. These institutions are vital to the mission of the Church, but HHS does not deem them “religious employers” worthy of conscience protection because they do not “serve primarily persons who share the[ir] religious tenets.” HHS denies these organizations religious freedom precisely because their purpose is to serve the common good of society — a purpose that government should encourage, not punish.

2) The mandate forces these institutions and others, against their conscience, to pay for things they consider immoral. Under the mandate, the government forces *religious insurers* to write policies that violate their beliefs; forces *religious employers and schools* to sponsor and subsidize coverage that violates their beliefs; and forces *religious employees and students* to purchase coverage that violates their beliefs.

3) The mandate forces coverage of sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs and devices, as well as contraception. Though commonly called the “contraceptive mandate,” HHS's mandate also forces employers to sponsor and subsidize coverage of sterilization. And by including all drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as contraceptives, the HHS mandate includes drugs that can induce abortion, such as “Ella,” a close cousin of the abortion pill RU-486.

4) Catholics of all political persuasions are unified in their opposition to the mandate. Catholics who have long supported this Administration and its healthcare

policies have publicly criticized HHS's decision, including columnists E.J. Dionne, Mark Shields, and Michael Sean Winters; college presidents Father John Jenkins and Arturo Chavez; and Daughter of Charity Sister Carol Keehan, president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States.

5) Many other religious and secular people and groups have spoken out strongly against the mandate. Many recognize this as an assault on the broader principle of religious liberty, even if they disagree with the Church on the underlying moral question. For example, Protestant Christian, Orthodox Christian, and Orthodox Jewish groups — none of which oppose contraception — have issued statements against the HHS decision. The Washington Post, USA Today, N.Y. Daily News, Detroit News, and other secular outlets, columnists, and bloggers have editorialized against it.

6) The federal mandate is much stricter than existing state mandates. HHS chose the narrowest state-level religious exemption as the model for its own. That exemption was drafted by the ACLU and exists in only 3 states (New York, California, Oregon). Even without a religious exemption, religious employers can already avoid the contraceptive mandates in 28 states by self-insuring their prescription drug coverage, dropping that coverage altogether, or opting for regulation under a federal law (ERISA) that preempts state law. The HHS mandate closes off all these avenues of relief.

Additional information on the U.S. Catholic bishops' stance on religious liberty, conscience protection, and the HHS mandate is available at [www.usccb.org/conscience](http://www.usccb.org/conscience).

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## WCC's First Executive Director Passes Away

Charles (Chuck) Phillips, the first director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference died January 30, 2012. He was 83 years old.



Phillips was Executive Director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference from its formation in 1969 until his retirement in 1992.

"The WCC as it exists today would not be what it is without Chuck's

leadership," said WCC Executive Director, John Huebscher. "It is fair to say no single person has had more to do with the formation of the conference and the identity it presented to Catholics, policy makers, and other organizations than he did. He set a high standard to live up to for anyone who follows him."

Phillips was also instrumental in forming the National Association of State Catholic Conference Directors, and served as the Association's President from 1974 to 1976. He was also a member of the Lay Advisory Council of the U.S. Catholic Conference in the 1970s.

Chuck is survived by his wife, Carol, and 7 children.

## WCC Election Guidelines Apply to Recalls

Wisconsin's election season is getting an early start in 2012. The filing of recall petitions against Governor Scott Walker, Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, and four state Senators has set in motion a process that could lead to elections for these offices as early as late May.

Parishes, diocesan offices, and other Catholic organizations are reminded that the WCC's *Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics* apply to all these races. The Guidelines encourage activities that promote voter participation in the process and warn against those activities that suggest or imply that the

Church supports or opposes individual candidates or parties.

Copies of these Guidelines are available at the WCC's website, [www.wisconsinatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinatholic.org), or by contacting the WCC office or diocesan offices of social concerns.

