

CAPITOL

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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Voters Change Face of State Government

Wisconsin voters gave state government a major overhaul on November 2nd by turning both the Governorship and the Legislature over to the Republicans. The change in the Legislature, where the GOP gained 13 seats in the Assembly, was the biggest one year shift in that house in 40 years. When he takes office on January 3rd, Governor-elect Scott Walker will be joined by Republican majorities in the Senate (19-14) and the Assembly (60-38 with 1 Independent).

New majorities mean new leaders. In the Assembly, the Republicans selected Jeff Fitzgerald of Horicon to be the new Speaker. Others in the leadership team include Representatives Scott Suder of Abbotsford as Majority Leader, Bill Kramer of Waukesha as Speaker Pro Tem, Scott Gunderson of Waterford as Caucus Chair, and Robin Vos of Burlington as co-chair of the Joint Committee on Finance. Assembly Democrats will be led by Representative Peter Barca of Kenosha as Minority Leader and Assistant Minority Leader Donna Seidel of Wausau.

Senate Republicans picked Senator Scott Fitzgerald of Juneau (the

Speaker's older brother) as Majority Leader and Senator Glenn Grothman of West Bend as Assistant Majority Leader. Senator Mike Ellis of Neenah will become President of the Senate and Senator Alberta Darling of River Hills will co-chair the Joint Committee on Finance. Democrats chose Senator Mark Miller of Monona as their Minority Leader and Senator Dave Hansen of Green Bay as Assistant Minority Leader.

The Governor-elect and new legislative leadership have signaled that helping Wisconsin's struggling economy will be their highest priority. Governor-elect Walker will call a special session on the day he takes office to address economic development. The state's fiscal deficit will also be a top priority. Crafting a budget that addresses that deficit without raising taxes will dominate the agenda for most of 2011. Most other issues will be addressed later.

In the coming weeks, the new leadership will decide on the structure and makeup of legislative committees for the 2011-12 session. Lawmakers will establish the legislative calendar for the next two years when they convene on January 3rd.

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

A common feature of post-election analysis is the exit poll and the data it provides about group voting behavior. Where Catholic voters are concerned, the 2010 exit polls confirm the findings of earlier surveys. Catholics remain swing voters. In 2008, Catholics supported President Obama and Democrats by a narrow margin. In 2010, they voted for Republicans, also by a narrow margin. Indeed, if one factors in the "margin of error" in such polls, it is possible Catholics are split 50-50.

Some take this to suggest that those of us who advocate for the bishops and the Church don't speak for a reliable bloc of voters. But such observations overlook two important facts.

One is that the bishops do not claim to speak for a voting bloc. Indeed, the USCCB statement on *Faithful Citizenship* explicitly reminds all who read it of that very fact. The goal of that statement and of other materials prepared by state Catholic conferences is to help inform Catholics, not deliver them to either political party.

The other vital fact is that elections reflect a voter's judgment on the candidates running for office, or on the performance of a presidential or gubernatorial administration. They are not referenda on Catholic teachings. No political party embraces all of Catholic teaching. Few candidates agree with every position the Church takes on policy questions. Many times Catholics vote for candidates in spite of the candidates' positions that differ from those of the Church, not because of them.

At the end of the day, election results and exit polls serve to remind us that there are no final victories or final defeats. Our task remains the same. When decision makers agree with our positions, we affirm that agreement. When they don't, we try to persuade them to do so.

The challenge of sharing the Catholic vision of a just society and of calling on our fellow citizens to share it is ongoing. And we don't need exit polls to tell us that.

New Parish Administrator Guide

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference has recently published the *Parish Administrator's Reference Guide to State Laws and Regulations*. The *Reference Guide* is a brief summary of a number of laws and administrative regulations that may affect how parishes operate in Wisconsin. Every two years, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference updates this guide for use as an aid by parish staff and others responsible for organizing parish-sponsored activities.

Organized into five sections, the reference guide covers items related to corporate governance and administration, pastoral activities, employment, taxation, and some miscellaneous items that often come up in day-to-day parish operations. While the guide is not an exhaustive overview of all the laws that may affect parishes, it does provide some basic information regarding activities common to parishes. The newly updated guide references some new provisions regarding employment law and mandatory meeting attendance for employees, as well as new requirements for worker classification documentation. For certain detailed topics, such as building codes that are affected by state law and local ordinance, the guide directs administrators to resources where they can find further information.

Although each section within the guide contains specific statutory reference, the WCC cautions this reference should not be used as an authoritative source. Laws are constantly changing and specific sections of this guide may be altered or superseded by new legislation. For verification or more detailed information, it is recommended that parishes consult a parish or diocesan attorney or the appropriate diocesan office.

The *Parish Administrator's Reference Guide* is available within the "Resources" section of the WCC website, or by visiting http://www.wisconsinatholic.org/administrator_guide.cfm. Printed copies are also available in limited supply through the WCC. Call 608-257-0004 or email office@wisconsinatholic.org for more information.



Issues Likely to Surface in 2011 Legislature

Given that Wisconsin's budget faces a two-year \$3 billion projected shortfall and unemployment hovers around 7 percent, balancing the state budget and job creation are expected to be the focus of the 2011-12 session. Nevertheless, several other issues of interest to the WCC will also receive attention.

Abortion Ban in Health Care Exchange. The new federal health care reform law calls on each state to design its own health insurance exchange by 2013. The law also permits states to pass legislation banning abortion coverage in the exchange. The WCC will pursue such a ban, as taxpayers should never be forced to subsidize abortions.

Health Insurance Mandate. The 2009 state budget included a provision that all health insurance companies include contraception coverage in their policies. The WCC will renew efforts to reverse this mandate because it impinges on religious liberty.

BadgerCare. BadgerCare is a state-administered health care coverage program that provides affordable or low cost coverage to people of limited means with children, and more recently, childless adults. Governor-elect Walker has indicated that he would like to make certain the program is limited to the "original intent" under which it was created. It has yet to be seen how this might affect the program, but the WCC will continue to support programs that help to fulfill the Church's objective of making affordable quality health care available to all, most especially for the poor and vulnerable.

Parental Choice. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) will receive attention as advocates call for its expansion, as well as improved accountability. Additionally, there will likely be efforts made to provide families with greater access to quality education options in both public and private schools. The WCC will

continue to advocate for education options that support parents in their role as the primary educators of their children.

Conceal and Carry. Conceal and carry advocates will reintroduce legislation to permit the carrying of concealed weapons in public places. The WCC opposed past efforts on the grounds that safety in Wisconsin has not diminished under the prohibition on concealed weapons, and because past proposals did not exempt churches, hospitals, and other facilities that serve vulnerable populations.

Voter Identification. Indications are that the Senate's first bill will require that all voters present photo identification at the polls. While the WCC has not taken a position on similar proposals in the past, staff will monitor the issue to ensure that any new proposal would not have the effect of disenfranchising poor and vulnerable voters.

At the beginning of every new session, the WCC publishes a set of "Public Policy Positions," which summarize the position of the Church in Wisconsin on a wide range of state budget and legislative issues. The document is distributed to legislators and other interested parties in an effort to promote the common good.

The bishops of Wisconsin will be approving the 2011 version this February, and Capitol Update and Capitol Report readers will be notified of its publication soon thereafter.



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Wisconsin Catholic Conference

131 W. Wilson Street, Suite 1105
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608/257-0004 Fax: 608/257-0376
E-mail: office@wisconsinatholic.org
Website: www.wisconsinatholic.org

WCC Staff

John Huebscher, Executive Director
Cathy Coyle-Kaufmann, Administrative Assistant
Barbara Sella, Associate Director for Respect Life/Social Concerns
Kim Wadas, Associate Director for Education/Health Care

New Payday Lending Laws in 2011

On January 1, 2011, new payday lending laws will go into effect prohibiting auto title loans outright and limiting payday loans to no more than \$1,500 or 35 percent of monthly income, with only one rollover. A statewide database will also ensure that lenders comply with the new law and that borrowers do not take out more than one loan at a time.

Recent news reports indicate that the new Legislature may make further changes to the law, but beyond that, it is not clear what these will be. While members of both political parties believe that some regulation of

the payday loan industry is in order, there are differences even within each party as to how much regulation is warranted.

The WCC supported regulating the industry after hearing from Catholic Charities agencies and St. Vincent de Paul councils about the spiraling debts that have resulted from these high interest, short-term loans. As the new law takes effect, the WCC will continue to consult with these charities on its implementation and any proposed changes to it.



Catholics at the Capitol 2011



Tuesday, April 5, 2011

Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center
Madison, Wisconsin

Keynote Speaker: Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI, Archbishop of Milwaukee

Join us for a day of Catholic fellowship, education, and advocacy!

Registration begins late January 2011.

Updates available at www.wisconsincatholic.org.