



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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CITING IMPACT ON COMMON GOOD WCC OPPOSES TAXPAYER PROTECTION AMENDMENT

Arguing that a constitutional amendment to limit revenue increases will inhibit the ability of public institutions to serve the common good and likely force disproportionate reductions in programs and services that serve the poor and needy, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference today urged legislators to oppose the TABOR-like Taxpayer Protection Amendment.

“The common good is about much more than revenue limits. The common good is the standard by which we measure our shared commitment to something that is bigger than ourselves,” wrote WCC Executive Director John Huebscher in testimony to legislators.

“The proposed Taxpayer Protection Amendment offers an overly narrow - and thus distorted - vision of the common good. It relies on an impersonal formula rather than the judgment of elected officials to define the scope of our government response to society’s needs,” he added.

Huebscher also argued that placing revenue limits in the constitution instead of the statutes would inhibit the ability of government to address pressing concerns and changing conditions.

“The months or years that it would take to either pass a referendum or repeal the TPA may seem like a short time to those with means. But it will seem much longer to those in need.

“A delay of two years is fully half a high school career for a 15-year-old. One year may be the difference between a minor illness and a life threatening condition for a person on Medicaid. Four months can be an eternity for a homeless family,” he suggested.

Pointing out that mandatory increases in some programs will intensify pressure to cut others when there is a constitutional limit on revenues, Huebscher predicted that the impact of “truth-in-sentencing” in future years would force increases in spending on prisons. Such a trend would leave programs for the needy even more susceptible to the budget axe.

Citing the experience in Colorado, he observed that “concerns over the impact of the Colorado revenue restrictions on the poor were a vital consideration to the bishops of Colorado when they supported a referendum last November to relax the constitutional constraints on government in that state.”

Huebscher recalled that a bedrock of Wisconsin’s progressive tradition is the idea that its citizens are interdependent and have a shared responsibility for each other. He suggested that the very name “Taxpayer Protection Amendment” plays on a fear of such responsibility.

“No law or amendment, however cleverly named or well-packaged, can protect us from the moral claims of our neighbors. No amendment can shield us from the claims of our children to a quality education, of the elderly to income security, of the ill to health care, of the poor to necessities of life, or of our descendants to the good stewardship of the natural resources left in trust to us by our ancestors.

“The Taxpayer Protection Amendment marks a retreat from the ideals that have made our state a special place. It undermines both our capacity to move forward and our mandate to care for the needy. It should not be approved,” he concluded.

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