

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

CAPITOL UPDATE

July 23, 2009

Contents Include:

1. WCC Issues Action Alert on Health Care Reform
2. Wisconsin Supreme Court Upholds Church Rights in Employment Cases, Affirms Right of Conscience
3. New Bills of Interest
4. Web Sites of Interest

WCC Issues Action Alert on Health Care Reform

The WCC this week issued an [Action Alert](#) on the federal health care legislation now moving through Congress. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and other pro-life groups are very concerned that the health care proposals being considered in both houses would mandate abortion coverage and weaken existing conscience protections. The USCCB Pro-Life Secretariat yesterday issued the following update:

“The health care debate has reached a critical stage in Congress. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) committee has approved a bill, after defeating a number of pro-life amendments. But, this bill is waiting for the Senate Finance Committee to complete work on the aspects of reform over which it has jurisdiction so the bills can be combined. The Finance Committee is trying to produce a bipartisan bill that addresses key criticisms of the Democratic-only bills moving forward thus far.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee has interrupted the markup of a House “tri-committee” bill to see what can be worked out on a number of key issues that are blocking broader support for the legislation, including pro-life concerns. Two other House committees passed the bill earlier this week, but it is Energy and Commerce that has jurisdiction over the parts of the bill where pro-life concerns are most pertinent. If these concerns are not worked out by consensus among Energy and Commerce committee members we will soon be writing to the committee specifically supporting amendments to address them.”

Update readers are urged to call or email their federal legislators through the WCC [Action Alert](#), asking them to support health care reform that truly respects the life and dignity of all human beings.

Wisconsin Supreme Court Upholds Church Rights in Employment Cases, Affirms Right of Conscience

In a July 23rd ruling, the Wisconsin Supreme Court clarified the scope of the “ministerial exemption” that insulates churches from government interference in personnel matters.

In a 4-3 decision, the court ruled that in determining whether a position in a religious organization is exempt from employment discrimination rules it is necessary to ask: 1) does the organization exist primarily to worship and spread the faith? and 2) How important or closely linked is the employee’s work to the fundamental mission of the organization?

The Court ruled that this approach is less intrusive to churches than a “quantitative approach” that analyzes the amount of time the employee spends on religious duties. The court also strongly affirmed the right of conscience in the Wisconsin Constitution and held that it provides “expansive protections for religious liberty.”

The ruling decided the case of *Coulee Catholic Schools vs. the Labor and Industrial Review Commission (LIRC) and Ostland*.

New Bills of Interest

[SB-240. Voting rights](#) (Taylor) Restores right to vote to certain persons ineligible to vote as a result of a felony conviction; changes information required on voter registration forms. To Labor, Elections & Urban Affairs.

Web Sites of Interest

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/waml>

- Who are my legislators

[Directory of Senate Members](#)

[Directory of Assembly Members](#)

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/leginfo.html>

- 2009-10 Session Schedule
- Weekly Schedule of Committee Activities
- Senate and Assembly Daily Floor Calendar

Capitol Update is a periodic e-mail on legislative issues from the Wisconsin Catholic Conference.

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