



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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WANT TO BE A FAITHFUL CITIZEN? ATTEND A HEARING ON THE STATE BUDGET

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Whenever we at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference talked to groups last year about the US Bishops' statement on political responsibility, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, we emphasized that faithful citizenship is about more than voting. It is about doing the hard work of citizenship on a year-round basis.

In the coming weeks, Catholics around the state who want to live out their call to be faithful citizens will have a chance to do so – by attending one of six hearings on the 2009 budget bill. The hearings, conducted by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance will take place over a two-week period beginning on Monday, March 23rd and concluding on Friday, April 3rd.

Citizens often complain that government decisions in Madison do not reflect the needs and opinions of the people across Wisconsin. But the Committee, like its predecessors in past years, is going on the road. The six hearings will take place at different locations around the state as follows:

- Monday, March 23rd—**Sparta**. American Legion Hall, 1116 Angelo Road.
- Wednesday, March 25th—**West Allis**. State Fair Park, Banquet Room 2, 640 s. 84th St.
- Friday, March 27th—**Eau Claire**. UW-Eau Claire Haas Fine Arts Center, 121 Water St.
- Monday, March 30th—**Racine**. Case High School Theater. 7345 Washington Ave.
- Wednesday, April 1st—**Appleton**. Lawrence University Stansbury Theater, 420 College Ave.
- Friday, April 3rd—**Cambridge**. Amundson Community Center, 200 Spring St.

This schedule gives people in Wisconsin a chance to be heard on the most important bill the legislature will consider in the next two years. And they won't have to travel all the way to Madison to do it.

These "on the road" hearings offer something else. Hearings in the Capitol tend to feature state agency leaders and lobbyists who work in or near the Capitol for a living and are expected to be there. Hearings held "out state" are for the convenience of the average citizen. They present an opportunity citizens should exploit.

Those who wish to testify should make sure to do the following:

Arrive early and complete a registration form. You may obtain the forms from the legislative pages who staff the hearing.

Plan on keeping your comments brief. Two or three minutes are enough time to explain your position. Committee members can follow up with questions if they want to know more.

Try to give personal or specific examples of why you support or oppose the budget item you are discussing.

If possible, have written copies of your testimony for the committee. This will help them keep a record of your views. If you have to leave before you are called to testify, you may leave the written testimony with a page. The page will make sure the committee receives it.

WCC will post its budget priorities on the Wisconsin Catholic Conference website (www.wisconsinatholic.org) around March 20th. We hope you will choose to address some of those issues in your testimony.

Faithful citizenship is about exercising political rights and taking advantage of political opportunities to make a difference. The Joint Committee on Finance has offered that opportunity. Now Catholics need to grasp it.