

## **WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

### **EYE ON THE CAPITOL**

**May 6, 2011**

#### **CONCEAL AND CARRY PROPOSAL IS POPULAR, BUT IS IT NECESSARY?**

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

The right to bear arms is protected by the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and by the Wisconsin Constitution. But that right, like many others, is not absolute and may be regulated to a certain extent. One such regulation is our state's current ban on carrying concealed weapons.

Wisconsin is nearly alone in that regard. For some time this fact has fueled a desire to join other states in permitting citizens to carry a concealed weapon (CCW). Such legislation has passed twice in recent years only to be vetoed by Governor Doyle.

This year the Legislature will consider the proposal again. Passage is likely, at least in some form.

But the bill's popularity notwithstanding, it remains fair to ask, is it necessary?

Wisconsin may be nearly alone among the fifty states in banning concealed weapons, but no one has made a compelling case that the ban has made our state less safe or creates a haven for violent criminals. Indeed, our crime rates remain comparatively low.

For a number of reasons, the WCC has also opposed conceal and carry laws in the past.

Safety is one reason. Both supporters and opponents of CCW agree that if the bills were to pass, the sale of handguns in the state would increase significantly. This proliferation of guns in our state is a cause for concern. The concern stems not from a fear that it will likely unleash a wave of intentional violence. Rather, it stems from the fact that a greater prevalence of guns is associated with greater numbers of accidental or unintentional firearm injuries and deaths. Moreover, such deaths are often among children, women, and the elderly.

Unlike hunting rifles, which are locked away when not in use, handguns are designed to be readily accessible and easily used. An altercation in which a gun is present is more likely to end in injury or death than when a gun is not present.

A second concern is that the proposals do not have adequate exceptions. The bills ban concealed weapons from government buildings and schools. However, concealed weapons will be permitted in churches, chapels, hospitals, and other public spaces.

Many of the states that permit the carrying of concealed weapons have certain limitations. More than a dozen states ban concealed weapons from churches, a number of others bar them from hospitals. If the bill is enacted here, Wisconsin should follow suit on these points.

A third concern is the impact conceal and carry proposals have on our democracy. If we encourage more and more Americans to arm themselves, what does this say about our respect for and trust in our law enforcement agencies and other public institutions? What message are we sending our children? And what are the long-term implications for our state and our nation if virtually no public space is gun free? Are our expectations of one another so low that we cannot imagine the existence of public spaces, such as houses of worship, as oases of peace?

As these bills are debated, we hope that legislators find a way to harmonize the rights of gun owners with those citizens who want to maintain certain community spaces free of weapons.

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