

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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RECALL-LOADED SUMMER UNLIKE ANY OTHER

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

The summer of the odd numbered year is usually quiet on the political scene. By early July the Legislature has completed its work on the state budget and goes home until autumn. Other than an occasional special election, the campaign season is more than a year away.

Not this year.

In 2011, Wisconsin's summer will be filled with recall elections in nine State Senate districts, encompassing all or parts of 41 of our state's 72 counties. The first stage will be primary elections in all nine districts scheduled for July 12. The second stage will conclude with the "general" recall elections four weeks later.

As anyone who follows the news understands, the recalls are the culmination of the heated debates over the budget repair bill considered in February and the divisive political climate that has descended on our state since. The recall elections will determine control of the State Senate for the next year and a half (less than that if we have more recalls early in 2012).

If the recent past is repeated, the campaigns will be expensive, negative, and dominated by ads from wealthy interest groups on both sides. Messages from the candidates themselves are likely to be muted by the din of the big money advertising and shrill commentary it engenders.

This column has said it before and says it again here. The Catholic Church is not a partisan organization. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) does not endorse candidates. The WCC does encourage citizen participation in public life. Voters are urged to become informed on the issues and involved in the support of candidates of their choice.

The WCC's *Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics* can be found on our website at www.wisconsinatholic.org. The *Guidelines* provide information on what parishes and church employees can and cannot do with church resources or while on the job. The list of "dos and don'ts" is intended to help Catholics understand the distinction between partisan electioneering and non-partisan voter education activities.

The WCC also urges interested citizens to review the "Faithful Citizenship" page in the *Resources* section of our website. This includes materials used in the 2010 election season, including suggested questions for candidates. The questions are related to the themes of Catholic teaching articulated in the U.S. bishops' statement on "Faithful Citizenship," which also offers useful food for thought for Catholics and others.

These materials can help voters weigh positions on important issues and encourage involvement. What they cannot do is tell us what candidate to support or how to be involved. Those are personal decisions left to our best judgment.

Another important decision is ours alone. That is the decision as to whether we choose to be civil and courteous in our participation. Catholic teaching is a tool to help us discern our position and persuade others of its merits. It is not a club with which to verbally assault those who disagree with us on the prudential judgments regarding policies and candidates.

No matter how divided Wisconsin is at the moment, we will still be neighbors when the recalls are over. We will still confront challenges and opportunities to make our communities better places. We Catholics will still sit next to each other at Mass and work beside each other in our parish activities. Let's live our faithful citizenship in a way that makes that easier when summer is over.

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