



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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BOTH PARTIES HAVE MADE THEIR STAND NOW COMES THE HARD PART

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

When he ran for President in 1968 as a 3rd party candidate, the late Gov. George Wallace often said, "there isn't a dime's worth of difference between the Democrats and Republicans." Were he alive today, Wallace wouldn't say that about the Democrats and Republicans in the Wisconsin legislature. As far as the state budget is concerned, there is a \$10 billion difference.

Resolving that difference is the task before the legislature this summer.

The Democrats control the Senate and the Republicans hold sway in the Assembly. Both parties use their power to craft budgets that reflect respective visions of what Wisconsin should look like and what part government should have in making it that way. In the process, both parties have lived up to the themes and messages they ran on in the last elections. In this sense, both have kept the promises they made to the voters.

Now both parties must keep another promise, that of resolving their differences for the sake of the larger public interest. Initially, that task falls to the 8-member Conference Committee of 4 Senators and 4 Representatives. This committee will negotiate a budget compromise to submit to all 132 legislators.

This could happen by mid-August. Or, it may take much of the autumn, for the differences are numerous and real. By any measure, ten billion dollars is a lot of ground to cover.

As the conferees begin their work, they may wish to consider that most of the voters who elected them, be they liberal or conservative, Democrats, Republicans or independents, are practical people. They care about the issues and they have values that mean a lot to them. But they also live every day with the knowledge that they can't have everything they want. They know that compromise and give and take are necessary parts of life.

The conferees are people of good will. They know what they have to do. They know some voices telling them what to do will be louder than others. Some of these voices may run ad campaigns intended more to inflame opinion than to enlighten it. It won't be easy, but in the end they will produce a budget.

We citizens can help.

We can also remind legislators that compromise is not a dirty word when it comes to setting spending priorities. We can tell them we know that our wishes aren't the only ones that matter, that other towns and other people may have needs equal to, or in some cases greater than, our own. We can assure them that we will judge their work by the state as a whole, not the funding for one program or one community or one special policy issue that may not even have a fiscal effect.

This may sound overly hopeful. But such a pragmatic commitment to the common good has been the rule not the exception in our state since 1848. Let's hope the conferees, their colleagues, and we citizens, remember that.

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