

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

November 10, 2015

THERE ARE TWO GOLDEN RULES THESE DAYS, WE ARE HEEDING THE WRONG ONE

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

When he spoke to Congress last month, Pope Francis quietly urged his listeners to heed the Golden Rule of “doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

But there is another golden rule. The late Governor Lee Dreyfus liked to refer to it from time to time. Commenting (with disfavor) on the nature of “old school politics” Dreyfus observed that the golden rule of such politics is “He who has the gold makes the rules.”

The application of that rule is in vivid display these days as the Legislature considers bills to “reform” the laws governing campaign finance.

Tucked into one of the bills sailing through the Legislature is a provision that doubles the maximum donation a well-heeled contributor may donate to a campaign or candidate for state or local office. The limit, set years ago, has not been adjusted since. Donors note that the cost of campaigning has gone up and the maximum donation doesn’t buy what it used to in the way of goods and services that campaigns need. Hence the desire of these donors to raise the limit on campaign contributions.

Of course, inflation hurts those who don’t have gold. Rising costs decrease the value of other things as well. One such thing is the purchasing power of the minimum wage. Indeed, the minimum wage has lost significant value since the late 1960’s when its purchasing power was sufficient to support a worker at the poverty level. State and federal lawmakers have raised the minimum wage since. But these increases have proven insufficient to match the increase of the cost of living.

There is ample evidence that minimum wage earners struggle to make ends meet. Low wages compel young workers to run up large debt paying for college or tech school. Low wages force parents trying to support their families with one job to take a second job that renders them unable to be home to care for their children after school. It is less clear that limits on campaign contributions have similarly harmed the “donor class” that seeks influence with the candidates to whom they donate.

In recent years, advocates for low wage workers urge lawmakers to raise the minimum wage and index it for inflation. Their requests have fallen on deaf ears. They lack the gold to be players in the campaign finance game. And thus they lack the ability to change the rules that govern the work place.

The golden rule described by Gov. Dreyfus does not foster the common good held up by Pope Francis when he visited our country. One doubts that history will look kindly on our decision to choose that rule over the Golden Rule the Holy Father urged upon Congress.

-30-

131 W. Wilson St., Suite 1105
Madison, WI 53703
608/257-0004
www.wisconsinatholic.org