

**ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
2007 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
FINAL UPDATE**

By Ron Johnson
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On Wednesday, June 20th, the Arizona Legislature adjourned sine die at 10:58 p.m. after spending a busy 164 days in session. The length of the session tied last year's mark as the fifth longest in Arizona history and featured the introduction of a near record 1,570 bills, memorials, and resolutions.

The dynamics of the Legislature are always unique following each election and this year was no exception. In particular, unlike the last two years, the Republican majorities in both chambers now have a much slimmer advantage over their Democratic counterparts.

The practical impact of these new dynamics resulted in a more collaborative Senate, but an increasingly divisive House. Additionally, despite the very large number of bills introduced, the nearly equal distribution of party membership has, nonetheless, made it more difficult to pass many pieces of legislation and resulted in significantly fewer bills being approved this year.

For its own part, the Arizona Catholic Conference (ACC) adapted to these changes and continued its success during the 2007 legislative session on a variety of the most important public policy matters that were considered. In this regard, it is particularly noteworthy that the ACC was once again able to defeat all of the bills it opposed, while making incremental gains on a number of important issues.

Sanctity of Life

Serious efforts to force healthcare providers to participate in the taking of innocent human life through the provision and/ or referral of abortifacients (i.e., emergency contraception) were once again introduced in each chamber this year. Fortunately, however, the ACC was able to defeat both of these bills (HB 2685 and SB 1470), as well as successfully amend other measures that could have unintentionally denied rights of conscience to healthcare providers.

Legislation to legalize assisted suicide (HB 2357 and HB 2572) also returned this session, but never received a hearing. Meanwhile, a new proposal (HB 2229) mandating that employers provide their employees with insurance coverage for in vitro fertilization did receive a hearing in the House Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee, but it was defeated on a 0-8 vote following the ACC's testimony in opposition to this morally problematic bill.

With regard to life issues supported by the ACC, \$1.5 million was successfully included in the state budget for abstinence until marriage funding, along with \$500,000 for crisis pregnancy centers. Unfortunately, however, a positive effort to codify meaningful procedures a minor must follow before obtaining an abortion without parental consent (HB 2641) did not pass when some of its supporters were unable to be present the final night of the session to vote in support.

Health and Charities

One of the more controversial items in the state budget this year was funding for the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccinations for teenage girls. Unlike a number of other states, however,

Arizona is fortunate in that the HPV funding includes a parental rights provision specifically stating that the vaccine will not be mandated for school attendance.

Another very positive item in the budget is a \$1 million appropriation that will be allocated to fund non-embryonic stem cell research. The ACC is very appreciative of Rep. Bob Stump's sponsorship of this proposal and continues to support efforts to make Arizona a leader on this important matter.

Prenatal care for low-income women was also expanded by increasing the income eligibility in the SOBRA program to 150 percent of the federal poverty line. Because prenatal care creates better birth outcomes for babies, it is estimated that such funding will actually save the state three dollars for every dollar spent on these services.

Finally, the ACC was a strong supporter of efforts to increase funding to faith based organizations and is very pleased with the passage of a measure to provide \$1 million in unclaimed lottery funds to nonprofit organizations, including faith based organizations serving the homeless. While this measure was approved, another proposal to simplify the charitable organization tax credit was unfortunately discarded in the final round of budget negotiations – but will be brought back again next year.

Education

Because of the tremendous legislative gains made last year, school choice will also be expanded in the coming year. Specifically, the \$10 million corporate tuition tax credit approved last year will increase next year by another \$2 million because of an automatic inflator that was built into the law. Additionally, the voucher programs for disabled and foster children have also been continued in next year's budget at \$2.5 million each.

Despite this good news in preserving the status quo, the ACC was still frustrated by the inability of the Legislature to pass new school choice legislation this year. In particular, proposals to extend the contribution date for tuition tax credits until April 15th of the following year and allow employers the opportunity to offer payroll deductions for these credits, were sadly deleted from the budget in the closing days of the session. Both of these measures, however, will return next session.

Immigration

Immigration remained a contentious issue at the Legislature this year with a number of proposals being introduced, almost exclusively in the House.

Of greatest concern to the ACC in this regard were measures that would have compelled local police to enforce federal immigration laws (HB 2461, HB 2751, and HCR 2049), and an effort to create a crime of trespass for all undocumented immigrants found in Arizona (HCR 2022). All of these measures were ultimately unsuccessful and did not make it over to the Senate.

Similarly, the ACC was also opposed to legislation (HB 2470) that would have denied worker's compensation to those seriously injured on the job, if they were undocumented immigrants. This bill was defeated in the House Commerce Committee on a 5-5 vote.

Finally, the ACC continued to oppose a bill (SB 1236) to prohibit state and local governments from using matricula consular cards as a form of identification, even by police officers. Ultimately, this measure was once again vetoed by the Governor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Arizona Catholic Conference had a successful year in defeating all of the measures it opposed, while making incremental gains on important issues. As preparations begin for next year's regular session, the ACC will continue to remain vigilant in both promoting and defending these issues in the public policy arena.

We are especially grateful to all of the many people who took the time to make calls, e-mails, or pray, when requested to take such actions. As always, please encourage anybody you know to sign up to receive free e-mail updates at www.azcatholicconference.org so that we may continue to grow the influence of the Church on these matters.