

ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 2005 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

By Ron Johnson
Arizona Catholic Conference

On Monday, January 10th, the 2005 Arizona legislative session began and the inevitable discussion surrounding various social issues and the budget dominated conversation at the Capitol. As always, business and special interest groups gathered to promote their agendas and protect their self interests for the upcoming session.

While most of the lobbying interests are primarily, if not exclusively, interested in gaining more pure political power, few speak clearly and consistently on matters of principle, without regard for partisan politics or the shifting tides of public opinion. The Catholic Church prides itself on being one of these unique entities whose interest is focused only on promoting the common good both in season and out of season.

The Catholic Church is represented at the legislature by the Arizona Catholic Conference (ACC), which is the public policy voice of the Dioceses of Tucson, Phoenix, and Gallup. Our core beliefs involve respect for all human life from conception until natural death. While some issues are always more important than others, the ACC's 2005 Legislative Agenda reflects the most significant issues of our time and are based on this central theme of Catholic teaching.

The following outline provides a survey of the issues contained in the ACC's Legislative Agenda. Each section contains a brief quotation of relevant Catholic teaching and then lists several concrete legislative proposals pertinent to each subject area. It should be noted that this outline is not meant to provide a comprehensive listing of bills that may arise during the session, but it is a good reflection of the ACC's legislative priorities.

LIFE ISSUES

“In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or vote for it.” (John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, #73)

There can be no more important legislative efforts than those aimed at protecting innocent human life. Similarly, all laws and policies should support the civil rights of people with religious convictions who refuse to cooperate in such evil actions.

- Support “rights of conscience” for all health care institutions and workers from any participation in morally objectionable activities (abortion, contraception, emergency contraception, assisted suicide, euthanasia, and sterilization) that are intrinsically evil
- Prohibit state funding and state supported institutions from participating in human cloning

- Enact a “fetal homicide” bill similar to the recently passed federal legislation
- Oppose efforts to mandate the provision of “emergency contraception” (i.e., morning after pills)
- Oppose the legalization of physician assisted suicide
- Eliminate the death penalty for all juveniles

DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE

“If it is true that all Catholics are obliged to oppose the legal recognition of homosexual unions, Catholic politicians are obliged to do so in a particular way, in keeping with their responsibility as politicians.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons, #10)

The nature of marriage as a lifelong union between a man and a woman has predated all laws and even organized religion. Marriage is the foundation of the family and the family is the basic unit of society. Consequently, there is a significant public policy interest in defending the traditional definition of marriage and its special place in society.

- Support an initiative to amend the Arizona Constitution to protect the traditional definition of marriage
- Encourage Congress to pass the Federal Marriage Amendment
- Eliminate existing marriage penalties in state law

HEALTH, WELFARE AND EDUCATION

“[T]he public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids – economic, social, educational, political and cultural assistance – that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way.” (John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, #45)

The Catholic Church places great value on the family as well as the fundamental rights of parents in decisions impacting the education of their children. Additionally, the Church has well established teaching emphasizing a “preferential option for the poor.” The ACC’s 2005 Legislative Agenda addresses these issues, which are often interwoven with each other, especially in light of the large numbers of families living in poverty.

- Expand the existing income tax credits for contributions to school tuition organizations and nonprofit organizations serving the working poor by eliminating the existing marriage penalties
- Support a corporate tuition tax credit benefiting low income students
- Support the removal of “kid cap” provisions currently prohibiting children conceived while the family is on TANF (welfare) from receiving benefits
- Preserve General Assistance funding for very low income people awaiting approval of Social Security Disability benefits

- Maintain access to health care for AHCCCS patients currently at or below the federal poverty line

IMMIGRATION

“Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.” (John Paul II, Ecclesia in America, #65)

Today’s undocumented immigrants largely come to our country for reasons of economic despair and family unification. Their remarkable faith and piety can be a great asset to our society. Our country clearly has the right to protect its borders, but we must not forget to provide undocumented immigrants with the basic inalienable rights to which all people are entitled while working for meaningful immigration reform at the federal level.

- Support drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants in order to increase the number of drivers with car insurance and to provide law enforcement with valid identification of people already on the road.
- Support in-state tuition at public universities for Arizona high school graduates that are undocumented
- Maintain trust in local law enforcement so that undocumented immigrants feel safe to report crimes without fear of their own deportation and leave the enforcement of immigration laws to federal officers