

Adjournment Sine Die, Without Assigning a Future Date to Reconvene

By Moe Wosepka, May 7, 2013

Representative Ankney rose from his desk during the morning of Wednesday, April 24th, made the motion to adjourn “sine die”, and the 63rd Legislative Assembly came to a close. The House made it look easy. The Senate took a different tact. Later the same morning, the Senate voted against a motion to suspend the rules and accept a key budget bill from the House. The bill, a supplement to the main budget bill, was a result of negotiations between the certain members from the House, Senate and Governor’s office. Without the supplemental bill, the budget would be vetoed, and the legislators would be back for a special session. The standoff lasted for a couple of hours. Then Senators, who recognized that their choice was to vote for suspension or spend a few more days in Helena, changed their votes, passed the rules suspension and the supplemental budget bill. Then they adjourned.

Overall this was a good session with a couple of major successes and some disappointments.

Under the category of major successes were:

HB 104 which makes it a homicide if abuse of a pregnant woman results in the death of the fetus, or unborn child. This is a real victory and a reason for us to celebrate. We not only passed legislation that protects women and their unborn child, but we gained support from those who often oppose us on these issues.

HB 391, a bill to require parental consent before an abortion is performed on a minor child passed into law. We expect that it will face a constitutional court challenge, but we hope to prevail.

SB 81, the Tuition Tax Credit bill was vetoed by the Governor, but this is the first time that a school choice bill has passed either chamber. The bill creates tax credits for those who donate for purposes of helping students in private, and public schools as well as in vocational education. This bill would a very positive affect on both Catholic schools and public schools, especially those in rural areas.

Under the category of disappointments, success in two major efforts continues to evade us. Repeal of the death penalty failed although we continue to make gains every session. Physician assisted suicide remains in a state of confusion. No one knows for sure if it is legal or illegal. We will continue to raise awareness on these issues, and we will gather greater support. Eventually we will pass both measures.

A third disappointment occurred when we were not able to pass Medicaid reform and expansion. Our health care system is broken and it won’t fix itself. The issue will not go away. Opposition to Medicaid expansion will not prevent the Affordable Care Act from being implemented.

Failure to pass Medicaid reform and expansion will have a major effect on our hospitals. Their profit margins are so small that the increased demand for services from the uninsured may put smaller hospitals out of business. Medicaid expansion would have prevented that. Reform is also imperative otherwise our system will collapse.

Support is growing. The usual group of hospitals, physicians, and other medical practitioners, the working poor, churches, and major poverty related organizations is being joined by business organizations and major firms. Medicaid reform and expansion is one of the major issues we will discuss in the next few years. It's time to bring these diverse groups together and find a common sense solution to this growing problem.

The 63rd Legislative Assembly is in the books. We thank all of you who worked with us and prayed for us. We look forward to working with you as we prepare for the 64th Assembly in 2015.