

The Halfway point of the 63rd Legislative Session. How are we doing?

By Moe Wosepka, Director, Montana Catholic Conference, March 5, 2013

The Montana legislature recently passed the halfway point on Thursday, February 28th. Budgets will now take a more visible place in the process as the subcommittee work is over and the full committee will combine their recommendations. Then the budget goes to the House floor for vote. This entire process will take nearly two weeks. In the meantime, all the general bills that made it through transmittal will be heard in the opposite chamber.

The work of the Montana Catholic Conference has gone fairly well. Several of the school bills that would help parents fund school enrollment in our Catholic schools are still in the mix. Medicaid expansion is being debated in a couple different forms. Regrettably only one of the adoption bills made transmittal, but we will bring the other bill back in the 2015 session.

Life issues are highly charged, and they evoke an emotional response that makes conversations difficult. These issues are about morality, religion, rights, life style, justice, freedom, autonomy, and that's not just one side, it's both sides. They are brought forth by passionate people who believe deeply in their cause. Seldom does the person working either side of life issues believe they are wrong. The most troubling aspect is when life becomes partisan. Partisan issues are often more about an individual or specific group than they are about the good of all.

HB 391, a bill to Revise Parental Consent Laws protects children, and HB 104, Creating Criminal Offense Involving Death of an Unborn Child protects women when they are in one of the most vulnerable times of their lives. And yet both bills become partisan because they are portrayed as limiting abortion and choice. But it isn't just one side of the aisle that discounts life when it comes to public policy issues. HB 370 a bill to Abolish the Death Penalty, also struggles because of a partisan stand.

The Catholic Church teaches that all life is sacred, not some life, but all life. We understand that it's hard to be consistent in support of life when people do horrible things. It's much easier to say those lives should not exist. But when we pick and choose which lives have value and which ones do not, we lose our credibility on nearly every other issue. Where do we draw the line? How do we justify support for children's programs, schools, jobs, and families, if we don't support policy that respects life?

The result is epitomized by a recent lawsuit filed recently by a couple because their child was born with a birth defect. It is a complicated issue, but when a couple feels justified in filing suit because a baby is born alive, we have to rethink who we are and what kind of a culture we want to live in. We should not feel justified in picking and choosing which lives to save and which ones to destroy.

It was unfortunate that Catholic Days at the legislature was cancelled. Changes in legislative schedules, beyond our control, vacated our opportunity. We will try again in 2015.

It is a new day, and another opportunity to change hearts and minds. Please keep the issues of the MCC, as well as the legislators and public policy advocates in your prayers as we enter the second half of the legislative session. If you would like weekly updates, please email mccalertnetwork@bresnan.net or log onto our website www.montanacc.org.