

Life and Death, And All That's In-Between At The Montana State Capital
February 2007

The legislative session has passed the half way point. We have come through the time when bills that have been languishing, and still technically alive, are now dead. By missing the deadline, bills that did not make it to the other chamber cannot be revived.

We have worked hard in getting some issues through the first half. Others have disappeared. This winnowing process has at the least given us a chance to refocus and prioritize for the home stretch. Our adoption bills HB490, Tax Credit for Adoptions, and HB713, Revise post-adoption services did well in the House, and I don't expect a lot of problems in the second half. I pray the death penalty abolition bill is still alive as you read this note. If it is, please keep it in prayer. We have made historic advances, and hopefully it is still moving on.

The session is scheduled to conclude on the 28th of April, which is not that far away, and nearly everything that made it through the first half is still in play. To top it off, the legislators will face the big question, "It's a great idea, but how do we pay for this?" The budget process has gone through the Joint Senate and House Appropriations Hearings. Then to the surprise of many, it was tabled and 6 new bills came out of it. This is part of a process to gain advantage, either in the Senate or in the press. The hostages have been taken, and the trading has begun. How it comes out we shall see. The Senate has the hammer when it comes to the budget because the bill they pass will be the one which will be transmitted to the Conference Committee for final approval.

The Conference Committee which is made up of a couple of Senators and a couple of Representatives will meet after the Senate passes the bill and reconcile the House and Senate versions into one, before sending it to the Governor to sign. Why the Conference Committee you ask? The Committee is necessary since this bill will certainly be passed in the House in one form and will be changed in the Senate. The bill needs to be reconciled between the two chambers because only one version can be sent to the Governor for signature, and they will not be the same. Legislative rules allow for the reconciliation to occur with a small committee as opposed to sending it back for full debate in the House and the Senate. The wise sages of the legislature would tell you that would be the best way to ensure the legislators never go home. Some may think that a good idea, but most, including legislators, don't agree. So the Conference Committee will work through the changes and finalize the bill. Here's how the Senate gains the upper hand. The bill that the Conference Committee considers is the very latest version. Since it started in the House, the Senate bill will be the latest version. The opposite will be true if it started in the Senate.

We are in the final stages of the session. What happens now will be what we live with. **The importance of you being involved has just been ratcheted up.** The pace is frantic, and your input is now more important than at any other time.

As you know, we cannot be current in these monthly pieces, but we can let you know how to access current information. The best way to stay current with Catholic issues is through the MCC Alert Network and our web site.

Our legislative alert network is up and running, with a couple hundred people getting our email alerts. The network features a weekly status of legislation we are working on. In addition it has a feature to alert you when a bill needs your input. We will let you know who to talk to, and will provide contact information. All you need to do is email: mccalertnetwork@bresnan.net, or visit our website at www.montanacc.org. We invite you to sign up, get involved, and pass the word along to others. And please pray for the elected officials and all others who are working to develop good public policy during this legislative session.

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