

The 60th Legislative Session is underway. Hearings and floor sessions are in full swing. There is an old adage that says, "Somewhere a committee is meeting to decide your fate, and you aren't invited." In some ways the legislative session is like that. It's not that you aren't invited, but it's difficult to find the meeting that is deciding your fate if you aren't here all the time.

During legislative sessions timely information is critical. Over 2200 bills were submitted for draft. Many of those will not make it onto the floor for a vote, but many will. When the session started we identified over 200 bill draft titles that have interest to Catholics in the state. We certainly know we cannot monitor that many bills, but when this all began it was a matter of being vigilant and watching every draft that was submitted. As we read through the bills we found many were just as the title said they were, but some had unintended consequences.

We are now into the meat of the session. Transmittal deadline is scheduled for February 28th, which means that those bills started in the House of Representatives must get through committee and be approved on third reading on the House floor and then transmitted to the Senate by that time. The same is true with bills started in the Senate. A few exceptions exist for revenue bills, but the crunch will be on for all others.

We are working on numerous bills. Some of these bills could have a huge impact on the poor, the courts, our children and schools, and our Catholic hospitals and health care.

Our focus on life issues is paramount, and in this session Senator Dan Harrington of Butte has agreed to sponsor a bill to abolish the death penalty. Another abolition bill has been submitted for draft by Representative Joey Jayne of Arlee. We will be working with these sponsors, and will be asking for your support when committee hearings are scheduled.

Another bill we will be working on is to eliminate a tax liability (penalty) for those who adopt in Montana. The bill is at the request of Catholic Social Services of Montana. Representative Julie French of Scobey has agreed to sponsor the bill. Over 250 children who were in foster care in Montana last year have a new family through the adoption process. Approximately 100 more infants were placed in permanent homes. The tax penalty is inadvertent, one of those unintended consequences, however it still needs to be corrected. This bill will correct the problem, and will encourage adoption in the state.

To get this and other legislation passed we need to work together. Here's how we can do that.

The legislators live in your towns, and counties. You see them in Mass, at football games, and the grocery store. You elected them. They work for you. Since they work for you

they will most likely respond to your requests with more attentiveness than requests from others.

We need to remember that Legislators have a difficult job and they need our support. The issues are complicated and not everyone is happy with the decisions that are made. Sometimes all they need is a letter from home. Legislators love to stand on the floor during debate, and hold up 100 letters from constituents to support their position. It not only shows that the issue has support, but it helps them with direction, and shows them they are valued, and appreciated.

We will help you stay current. 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 where you will be notified via email when a bill needs work. We will let you know who to talk to, and 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.

You can contact Moe Wosepka, Executive Director of Montana Catholic Conference at director@montanacc.org.