

**ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE  
2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION  
FINAL UPDATE**

By Ron Johnson  
Arizona Catholic Conference

On Friday, June 27th, the Arizona Legislature adjourned sine die after spending 166 days in session. Not only was this session one of the longest in Arizona history, it also marked one of the most acrimonious sessions in recent years.

Before finishing its business, the Legislature passed a budget aimed at reducing an approximately \$2 billion deficit. In order to erase this deficit, the budget bills resorted to significant amounts of cuts as well as bonding. Still, many observers believe that this budget may not be adequate for the coming year and that a special session will be necessary to again balance the budget.

For its own part, the Arizona Catholic Conference (ACC) had much success in being able to defeat the bills it opposed while getting a number of important issues through the Legislature. Unfortunately, however, given the difficult situation with the budget, some of the programs we supported fared well while others fell victim to cuts.

**Marriage**

Many hot issues were debated at the Legislature this year, but none more so than the effort (SCR 1042) to place a referendum on the November ballot defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Arizona currently has a statute defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Nonetheless, without a provision in the Arizona Constitution defining marriage, a future Arizona Supreme Court could overturn this statute as was recently done in California.

Working closely with the Center for Arizona Policy and a number of key legislators, the ACC diligently pursued this matter all session long. Thankfully, the Legislature approved the measure on the last night of the session thereby allowing Arizona voters to ultimately decide this important issue.

**Sanctity of Life**

A serious effort to force healthcare providers to participate in the taking of innocent human life through the provision and/or referral of abortifacients (i.e., emergency contraception) was once again introduced this year (HB 2674). Fortunately, however, the ACC was able to defeat this bill as well as another attempt to legalize assisted suicide (HB 2387).

The ACC actively supported several abortion related bills that were introduced this session, including two bills that would have created a state ban on partial birth abortions (SB 1048 and HB 2769) and another that would have solidified the judicial bypass procedures a minor must follow before getting an abortion without parental consent (HB 2263).

Even though Governor Napolitano ultimately vetoed each of these bills, the ACC is grateful to Senator Linda Gray, Representative Andy Tobin, and Representative Warde Nichols for sponsoring these respective measures.

We were also disappointed that the final budget that was passed eliminated gains that were made in recent years relating to funding for abstinence until marriage programs and crisis pregnancy centers.

On a positive note, however, the Governor did sign "Jesse's Law" (HB 2823) which helped close a loophole pertaining to the denial of food and fluids to patients in certain end of life situations.

### **Immigration**

A large number of immigration bills were once again introduced this year, but there was no significant movement on any of the most problematic proposals.

In particular, all legislative attempts to refer immigration measures to the ballot this year failed including proposals that would have done the following: 1) compel local police to enforce federal immigration laws and make the presence of undocumented immigrants a felony (HCR 2039); 2) deny local governments, including police departments, the ability to use the matricula consular card as a form of identification (HCR 2042 and SCR 1012); and 3) require all educational institutions from pre-K through college to force students to prove their legal status.

In addition to the failed referendum attempts, there were also efforts to deny worker's compensation to undocumented immigrants (HB 2750); require landlords to check the citizenship of their tenants (HB 2625); and make undocumented immigrants reimburse the government for any public benefit used, including elementary school education (HB 2624). Once again, all of these measures failed as well.

### **Education**

Arizona has become a real leader in terms of school choice legislation by virtue of the many bills we have passed on this topic in recent years. Fortunately, efforts to eliminate the tuition tax credits for both individuals and corporations were easily defeated, including a late session floor amendment.

Unfortunately, however, the newly created voucher programs for foster and disabled children became the victim of budget cuts at the end of the session and were suspended.

## **Vulnerable Populations**

Given the tremendous budget problems facing the state this year, funding for important programs assisting people in need fared relatively well. Of particular note, the ACC was very pleased that efforts to preserve General Assistance funding for very low-income people awaiting Social Security Disability benefits was preserved.

Additionally, the Housing Trust Fund was able to maintain most of its money for important programs. Consequently, much needed programs aimed at preventing homelessness, creating low-income housing, and helping people avoid foreclosures will all continue to operate.

## **Conclusion**

The ACC is grateful to all of the people who supported our efforts through prayers and e-mails this session and we look forward to working with you again on the public policy issues of greatest import to the Catholic Church.

As always, your assistance in encouraging anybody you know to sign up for free e-mail updates at [www.azcatholicconference.org](http://www.azcatholicconference.org) will help us continue to grow the influence of the Church on these matters.

---

*Please feel free to forward this message and encourage the people you know to sign up for these free updates at [www.azcatholicconference.org](http://www.azcatholicconference.org) so that we can continue to expand our influence on matters of importance to the Catholic Church.*