



Legislative UPDATE

Website

VOLUME 2

2007 REGULAR SESSION

JUNE 29, 2007

OVERVIEW

We had a successful legislative session in many areas. Most of our pro-life measures passed, funding for programs impacting the poor was increased across the board, and we obtained substantial additional financial help for our schools.

Much of the session was devoted to the major money battles. The key issue was how much of the \$3.1 Billion surplus state government should spend, and how much of it should be returned to the voters in the form of tax cuts.

Our use of the new voterVOICE electronic legislative advocacy software went very well. Large numbers of Louisiana Catholics contacted their legislators and the Governor on the specific issues we brought to their attention.

BACKGROUND NOTE REGARDING HB 1 (THE \$29 BILLION APPROPRIATIONS BILL): The Governor is required by the Constitution to balance expenses versus projected revenues. The fiscal picture is currently out of balance via the various spending and tax reduction bills sent to her by the Legislature. Blanco either will line-item veto certain expenses in the Appropriations Bill (HB 1) or veto specific tax credit/deduction bills.

HIGH PRIORITY ISSUES

(ALL ISSUES ARE LISTED BY PRIORITY IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER.)

ABORTION: Both **Partial Birth Abortion bans**, by Rep. Gary Beard (HB 614), and Sen. Ben Nevers (SB 161) easily passed through the Legislature and are on Gov. Blanco's desk awaiting her expected signature. These bills are needed in state law so that state authorities can prosecute this crime. Relying on federal prosecutors to enforce federal law is problematic, as these politically appointed law enforcers might not have the interest or the time to prosecute the doctors breaking the law.

Also on the Governor's desk is the **Fetal Pain** bill authored by Rep. A.G. Crowe (HB 25). The bill would require abortionists to inform a woman having an abortion that her unborn child will feel pain during the dismemberment, and that anesthesia is available for the child, if she so chooses to use it. Finally, there is \$1 Million in **Abortion Alternatives** money in HB 1 due to Rep. Steve Scalise's efforts.

ABSTINENCE FUNDING: HB 1 has \$1.2 Million in flow through federal dollars that will be used for abstinence education. This is an increase from last year.

CONTRACEPTIVES: HB 1 has \$839,500 in it for condom distribution via DHH's Personal Health Services Division.

CLONING: Reps. Michael Jackson and Don Cazayoux were successful in getting \$2 Million appropriated for non-embryonic stem cell research. This was done via supplemental appropriations bill HB 765. This bill has already been signed by the Governor. HB 866 by Rep. Beard was a bill that would have provided

tax credits for morally licit stem cell research using umbilical cords and placentas. HB 623, also by Beard, would have banned the use of state funds for embryonic stem cell research. Neither bill was given a hearing by the respective committee chairman. Rep. Beard attached the language from HB 866 to a tax relief bill for brownfield environmental issues when that particular legislative instrument arrived in the House. Unfortunately, it was stripped off when it was returned to the Senate for concurrence in amendments.

DEATH PENALTY: Current law requires District Attorneys to seek a capital verdict in first degree murder cases. SB 147 by Sen. Sherri Cheek will allow them the option of offering a jury either the death penalty or life imprisonment without benefit of parole, pardon, or suspension of sentence. This bill has been signed by the Governor as Act 147 of the 2007 legislative session.

MINIMUM WAGE: HB 119 by Rep. Willie Hunter came out of House Labor and Industrial Affairs Committee but was defeated on the House floor by business lobbyists. This was despite the fact that it was amended to exactly match the recently passed federal bill on the same topic.

SCHOOL FUNDING: A \$3 Million increase in **Required Services** funding, our first upturn in 8 years, is included in HB 1. HB 765 is the Supplemental Appropriations bill. At LCC's request Rep. Dan Morrish amended us into it. We now will receive \$3.75 Million (15% of the overall \$25 Million line item) in one-time surplus **Classroom Technology funds**.

STELLY PLAN: There was a plethora of bills seeking to revise the Stelly Plan voters approved in 2003. Our interest was in making sure that spending for the poor did not get impacted by overly generous tax cuts for the rich. The final result was the passage of HB 365 by Rep. Taylor Townsend. It provides a phased in restoration of tax deductions for charitable giving and other itemized deductions. The poor are not impacted by this modest tax cut. Funding for all social programs was increased markedly throughout the state budget.

VOUCHERS: Our bill, HB 623 by Rep. Steve Scalise, was defeated in House Education on a 7-9 vote.

MEDIUM PRIORITY ISSUES

CAFETERIA WORKERS PAY RAISE: HB 1 has a \$1,000 per year pay raise in it for full-time cafeteria workers who work in private schools.

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT: SB 341 provides a state tax credit to the working poor equal to 3.5% of an individual's federal earned income tax credit. This is a first for Louisiana. It would take effect in 2008. The bill is on the Governor's desk.

FOOD SALES TAX EXEMPTION: Our bill, HB 241 by Rep. Damon Baldone, would remove the sales taxes that private schools pay for the food we buy to feed our students. Neither the public schools nor the public at large pay this tax. The bill sits on the Governor's desk.

FOSTER AND RESIDENTIAL CARE: HB 1 has a significant increase in it for the first time in 11 years. Catholic Charities is a major participant in these programs.

HOUSING: HB 223 by Rep. Joe Toomy would have permitted each civil parish to block the LHFA (Louisiana Housing Finance Authority) from granting tax credits to builders of low income housing. Minorities and disabled people would have been disproportionately affected. This bill was never heard in committee due to strong prior public opposition, including that of LCC.

INMATE RESTITUTION PLAN: HB 217 by Rep. John LaBruzzo called for inmates to have to pay back to the state all the costs of their incarceration. The author never asked for a committee hearing on his bill.

INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES: HB 1 has an increase in funding for the first time in many years for our facilities for the disabled.

LIQUOR STORES NEXT TO CHURCHES: At our request Rep. Bobby Faucheux never heard his bill (HB 116) in committee.

NONPROFIT CIVIL LIABILITY: HB 643, our bill, by Reps. Errol Romero and Sydnie Mae Durand awaits gubernatorial action. It gives volunteers working for Catholic Charities, and three other nonprofits, liability when they are in the process of aiding people without transportation and who are evacuating from a NOAA-certified hurricane.

NURSING HOME BEDS: SB 97, our bill, by Sen. Tom Schedler, awaits action by the Governor. It provides a specific exemption for eight beds at Wynhoven from the moratorium on beds passed last year. This facility got caught up in hurricane related construction delays and could not be completed in time.

ST. MARY'S HOME FOR THE DISABLED: SB 180, our bill, by Sen. Joe McPherson, would involve a land swap with the state such that St. Mary's can build more group homes for our children. It has been sent to the Governor for executive action.

TUITION TAX DEDUCTION FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL PARENTS: SB 45 by Sen. Rob Marionneaux started out as a straight tax credit. This would have cut state revenue by \$272 Million, and was going nowhere legislatively. It was amended to be a tax deduction with a modest fiscal note of \$4.8 Million. It passed both chambers and now sits on the Governor's desk. It would begin on July 1, 2008, last two years, and provide a deduction for 50% of tuition and fees up to a \$5,000 tuition level. The typical parent would receive \$200 to \$300 per year from this tax deduction (not tax credit). The public school teacher unions are lobbying Gov. Blanco to veto the bill. Meanwhile, a large pushback is being carried out by nonpublic school proponents who are urging her to sign the bill. This is being done with our new voterVOICE electronic email advocacy system.

LOW PRIORITY ISSUES

ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN: HB 869 by Rep. Cedric Richmond was never heard in committee due to vigorous opposition from the NRA.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM: HB 542 by Rep. Monica Walker expands the number of children eligible to receive care. The family income cap was raised from 200% to 300% of the federal poverty line. We also checked to make sure that none of these monies were being used to expand contraceptive distribution to young people, as has occurred in other states. This bill awaits gubernatorial action.

COASTAL RESTORATION: HB 942, a supplemental capital outlay appropriations bill by Rep. John Alario would have provided \$200 Million in funding for Coastal Restoration. It moved out of the Appropriations Committee but was never heard on the House floor.

FOOD BANK: LCC helped Natalie Jayroe of Second Harvest (associated with Archdiocese of New Orleans Catholic Charities) in obtaining state funding for the first time. \$5 Million was included in the Supplemental Appropriations bill (HB 765) which has already been signed by Blanco.

ODOR ENVIRONMENTAL BILL: HB 758 by Rep. Billy Montgomery started out as a bill that would have given local municipalities the legal ability to prosecute companies for emitting foul odors. Currently only the State Department of Environmental Quality has this authority. It was amended to deal only with the one animal rendering plant in Shreveport that is in the author's district. The bill awaits the Governor's attention.

SANCTUARY FOR LIFE: We worked with two Baton Rouge legislators in attempting to get first time funding of \$80,000 for this unwed mothers' care and training program. Due to the late nature of the request we were unsuccessful in getting it attached to several supplemental appropriations bills.