

# Good News

*Bringing the light of Christ to Missouri.*



May 2011  
Vol. 30 No. 4

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**“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God,’ and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being.”**

**Congregation for the  
Doctrine of the Faith  
*Donum Vitae*, 1987**

## MCC Enjoys Productive Legislative Session

The Missouri Catholic Conference saw major success in this year’s session of the Missouri General Assembly. Many of the bills that the MCC had a hand in passing protect the most vulnerable and work to save human life at the earliest stages of development.

The MCC Citizen’s Network members contributed to the success by making calls and sending emails and letters to their state legislators.

### ***Restrictions on Late-Term Abortions***

In the last week of the legislative session, the Missouri House and Senate both debated bills to restrict late-term abortions. The Senate gave final approval to House Bill 213 in a matter of minutes with little discussion. (See Senate vote on HB 213). In the House, however, discussion became heated and emotional. One representative, Tishaura Jones (D-St. Louis), insisted that the state shouldn’t be part of the decision.

“The state needs to get out of my belly, out of my uterus, because that’s my decision,” she said.

Other opponents to the legislation also tried to draw attention to the choice of the mother, but Majority Floor Leader Tim Jones (R-Eureka), the bill’s sponsor, insisted that the focus of the argument

was, and should be, about human life.

“This question is whether or not you support the barbaric practice of ripping a child from the mother’s womb in the late term and slaughtering that infant,” Rep. Tim Jones said.

After an hour of heated discussion, debate ended and the House gave final approval to the bill with overwhelming bipartisan support. (See House vote 2 on Late-Term Abortions).

The legislation narrows the health exception for late-term abortions to situations where the mother’s life is endangered or when carrying the baby to term would pose serious risk to a major bodily function. The legislation also stipulates that a doctor seeking an abortion on a viable child must get the opinion of a second physician, who must agree that the mother’s life is at risk if the pregnancy is continued.

Doctors who perform abortions on viable babies after 20 weeks when the mother’s life is not in danger would face felony charges and fines up to \$50,000.

The Missouri General Assembly sent both bills to the governor’s desk for his signature.

*Continued inside ...*

# MCC Enjoys Productive Legislative Session continued ...

## **Human Trafficking Penalties**

Media reports over the last year have told horrific stories of young women branded with bar codes and forced to serve as sex slaves. The general assembly responded to this situation by passing a strong new law increasing penalties against human traffickers.

The MCC's Tyler McClay worked with Rep. Anne Zerr (R-St. Charles) on House Bill 214, which would allow convicted labor or sex traffickers to be sentenced to up to 20 years in prison. (Prison sentences for those crimes are currently up to 15 years.) Convicted traffickers could also face \$250,000 in fines.

The legislation requires courts to order convicted traffickers to pay restitution to compensate victims for their labor and pay for necessary rehabilitation.

Another important aspect of the legislation is that it creates an avenue for law enforcement to help suspected victims. The bill requires law enforcement to refer victims of trafficking to social services agencies for emergency housing, counseling and other assistance.

## **Funding for In-Home Care Services and Alternatives to Abortion**

Despite state budget constraints, the

general assembly upheld funding for several programs the MCC supports, including in-home care for the elderly and alternatives to abortion. The in-home care program saves state revenue by allowing lower-income persons to live at home and not enter a nursing home, where the cost is higher and is paid for by the federal Medicaid program. The General Assembly appropriates funds for in-home care services, and the state then contracts with providers (such as Catholic Charities agencies) to give these services.

Funding for in-home care appeared to be in jeopardy earlier in the session because of differences between the House and Senate. The Missouri Senate stripped \$9 million from the program, which would have made it difficult to adequately reimburse in-home caregivers. The MCC Citizen's Network contacted legislators and urged restoration of the funding. Eventually, a conference of House and Senate members agreed to restore the funding. Now, the vulnerable elderly will be able to stay out of nursing homes and more caregivers will be able to provide vital services such as bathing, cooking and respite care.

## **Adoption Records**

Another bill backed by the MCC will make it easier for adopted adults to get access to their birth records. The

MCC worked during the last two sessions to secure passage of this legislation, which seeks to balance the rights of the adopted adult with the rights of the biological parents.

Sen. John Lamping (R-St. Louis) sponsored the legislation (Senate Bill 351), and Rep. Jay Barnes (R-Jefferson City) handled the bill in the Missouri House.

## **Cord Blood Banking**

Pregnant women will now have access to more information about how they can donate their cord blood thanks to a bill passed by the general assembly. Cord blood contains rich stem cells that can be extracted and used in a variety of medical treatments, such as leukemia, other cancers and blood disorders. Sen. Jim Lembke (R-St. Louis) championed the measure, which was added to HB 197.

The measure requires the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to post information on its website about umbilical cord blood, including options for mothers to donate their cord blood at either public or private cord blood banks. The measure also encourages obstetricians and gynecologists to provide pregnant women they are caring for with information on how to donate their cord blood.

# Setting the Stage for Next Year

While other bills the MCC worked on did not fare as well as those about human trafficking or abortion restrictions, the groundwork was laid for success in the future. The MCC worked to reform payday lending and to create more transparency and accountability with life science entities that receive state funds. These bills

did not gain approval from the legislature, but the MCC did find legislators willing to sponsor similar bills next session.

## **Payday Lending Reform**

Abuses in the payday lending industry have been well-documented in the media. These are short-term loans

of \$500 or less. A borrower writes a postdated check to obtain the loan for a two-week period, after which the lender can cash the postdated check. Unfortunately, in Missouri borrowers can renew the loan six times.

The Missouri House passed a payday  
*Continued on next page ...*

# Setting the Stage for Next Year continued...

lending bill (House Bill 656), which purported to reform the industry, but failed to protect consumers. Under the legislation, a payday loan could be renewed three times, and the borrower could pay fees that would add up to 60 percent of the original loan.

The MCC issued a floor letter to state representatives on HB 656 detailing how fees mount on a \$300

loan so that after three renewals the borrower has paid \$178.50 in fees. The MCC also offered examples of reform in other states, such as Florida, which caps the fees at 10 percent of the loan and prohibits any renewals. The payday loan industry is thriving in Florida even with these restrictions. The way the industry operates in Florida shows that Missouri can create a fee cap that allows the industry to operate at a profit, while still protecting consumers.

Another problem with HB 656 was that it only required the borrower to pay down \$25 on the loan's principal to renew it for another two weeks. Real reform would require that the borrower pay down at least \$50. This would encourage personal responsibility and quicker payoff of the loan.

The MCC also indicated support for a computer tracking system so that lenders could verify whether prospective borrowers have an outstanding payday loan elsewhere. This would prevent borrowers from having outstanding loans with different lenders.

Despite the arguments of the MCC, the Missouri House approved HB 656. (See House vote 1 on payday lending). In the Missouri Senate, however, the MCC's arguments against

the payday lending bill carried the day. HB 656 never reached the Senate floor for debate.



Sen. John Lamping

Sen. John Lamping (R-St. Louis), who worked in the financial industry for more than 25 years, emerged as an advocate of real payday lending reform, and he pledged to work with Sen. Joe Keaveny (D-St. Louis) next session on a bill with more consumer protections.

## ***Stopping State Funds for Embryonic Stem Cell Research***

Whether public funds are being used for embryonic stem cell research or human cloning was at issue this year as the Missouri General Assembly considered expanding the authority of the quasi-public Missouri Technology Corporation (MTC), which distributes state funds for life science projects.

In order to ensure that the MTC would be held accountable, the MCC supported a provision to make the organization's funding subject to appropriation. This meant that every year the MTC would have to seek their funding from the general assembly.

The power of the purse strings gives the general assembly virtual veto authority of state programs. The MCC realized that funding for the MTC would be tenuous at best and would depend on the MTC's good behavior. Any evidence that the MTC was funding embryonic stem cell research or human cloning could (and probably would) cause the general assembly to cut off funds to the MTC. The MCC knew, however, that the general assembly would not defund the MTC based on unfounded accusations. Appropriators would need proof that

the MTC was funding embryonic stem cell research or human cloning.

Therefore, the MCC drafted a provision whereby each January, prior to the opening of the legislative session, the MTC would be required to make a report to the general assembly. This report would inform legislators whether any state funds were used to finance projects involving embryonic stem cell research or human cloning.

House sponsor of the bill, Rep. John Diehl (R-Town and Country), and chairman of the House economic development committee, Rep. Anne Zerr (R-St. Charles), embraced the MCC reporting requirement. They viewed the MCC idea as a positive way to advance legitimate life science research while ensuring funds are not used for embryonic stem cell research or human cloning. They added the MCC provision to the MTC legislation, which passed the Missouri House on the last day of the session.

The Missouri Senate failed to take up the bill in the final hours of the last day, not because of opposition to the MCC provision, but because of disagreements with the Missouri House over tax credit reform.

Looking toward next year, a consensus has developed in support of the MCC reporting requirement. It is backed by most of the major pro-life groups, the representatives of the life science industry and the leadership of the Missouri General Assembly.

Adoption of the MCC reporting requirement, coupled with making MTC's funding subject to annual appropriation, can ensure that state funds are not used to finance embryonic stem cell research or human cloning.

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# The Hungry and Pregnant Women: Casualties of Tax Credit War

Tax credits that encourage donations to food pantries and pregnancy resource centers got caught in a crossfire between the Missouri House and Senate over tax credit reform this session.

The food pantry tax credit is set to expire in August of this year, while the tax credit for pregnancy resource centers will expire next August. The MCC sought approval by the legislature to reauthorize both tax credits for another four years.

There was little opposition to these two credits, but they became entangled in a larger debate over how to reform all of Missouri's 61 tax credit programs. From fiscal year 1998 to 2010, tax credits redeemed by taxpayers grew from \$102.7 million to \$521.5 million.

The food pantry and pregnancy resource credits, however, have minimal impact on the state budget in comparison to other credits. Both are capped so that no more than \$2 million can be claimed in any one fiscal year.

Food pantries are lifesavers in these hard economic times. Even people who normally do not seek assistance are showing up at food pantries. The pregnancy resource centers help women in crisis pregnancies to carry their child to term. Assistance offered by PRCs includes counseling, emergency housing, prenatal care and adoption services.

In 2012, the MCC will seek to enact a new food pantry credit and ensure reauthorization of the pregnancy resource credit before it expires.