



Good News

Bringing the Light of Christ to Missouri | March/April 2021

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The American Rescue Plan

On March 12, 2021 President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan (ARP) in the Oval Office, hours before addressing the nation on television. The \$1.9 trillion legislation will provide significant financial relief to Americans as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic that has plagued the world throughout the last year. Though the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) supported many elements of the plan, they expressed concerns regarding the failure of the legislation to include language ensuring no funding would be used to pay for abortions. In this edition of *Good News*, the MCC offers a summary of the bill, and addresses the pro-life concerns that it may raise.



Unpacking the American Rescue Plan

Stimulus Checks

The ARP will provide \$1,400 stimulus checks to individual taxpayers making less than \$75,000 and \$1,400 each to married couples making less than \$150,000. Taxpayers with dependents will also receive \$1,400 for each dependent. It is estimated that 90% of Missourians will receive stimulus checks.

Child Tax Credits

The ARP temporarily expands the child tax credit for tax year 2021, allowing families with low or no income to claim the credit even if they have no tax liability. The amount of the credit will be \$3,600 for children under age six and \$3,000 for children six to seventeen years old. The current child tax credit is \$2,000 for children under seventeen years of age. It is estimated that 1.2 million Missouri kids would benefit from the expanded child tax credit.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The earned income tax credit is a credit provided to low-income earners. It helps encourage work by providing a tax credit for workers without dependents who have earnings under \$16,000 annually. The amount of the tax credit is currently around \$500. The ARP increases the tax credit for tax year 2021 to \$1,500 and increases the income cap to \$21,000.

Unemployment/Employer Benefits

The ARP extends the CARES Act federal unemployment benefits of \$300 per week on top of state benefits for those who qualify through September 6, 2021. The ARP also makes the benefits received in 2021 non-taxable for certain earners and retroactively makes 2020 benefits received non-taxable, permitting those who already filed a return to file an amended return. The bill also includes funding to help employers retain and rehire workers, including grants for restaurants, expanded paycheck protection benefits for small businesses, help for airlines and other adversely impacted industries, along with grants for child-care expenses.

Assistance to Non-public Schools

The ARP includes \$2.75 billion, available through September 23, 2023, to provide services or assistance to non-public schools that enroll a significant percentage of low-income students and that are impacted by COVID-19. These funds are in addition to funds allocated in previous relief bills to non-public schools for COVID-19 related disruptions to education.



To read the USCCB's official statement on the passage of the ARP, visit [usccb.org](https://www.usccb.org).

Food/Housing Assistance

Among other provisions, the ARP extends the 15% increase in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits started during the pandemic through September 30, 2021. The bill also extends benefits for the duration of the public health emergency that provide meals for school-aged children who eat their breakfast and lunch at school but who currently are not in the classroom. The ARP provides supplemental funding to states and localities to assist families with rent and utility payments to help prevent evictions and to address homelessness.

Health Insurance/Health Care

The ARP increases subsidies available to people seeking health insurance in 2021 and 2022 through the health insurance exchange, the state health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act in 2010. The bill provides that no person getting health insurance through the exchange will be required to pay more than 8.5% of their income towards premiums. In addition, those who lost their jobs and are paying for the health insurance they had with their former employer through COBRA will receive a 100% subsidy of their insurance premiums through September 30, 2021.

The ARP also provides financial incentives for states to expand Medicaid if they have not done so. It also provides additional funding for COVID-19 testing and for the distribution and administering of COVID-19 vaccines.

Concerns Regarding Abortion Funding

The USCCB expressed grave concerns during debate on the ARP about failing to include pro-life protections in the final version of the bill. In a March 6, 2021 letter to the U.S. Senate, six USCCB Committee Chairmen urged a “no” vote on the bill because the ARP “provides billions of dollars for health care services through various funding streams that are not subject to Hyde Amendment or Helms Amendment protections and could therefore fund abortions domestically or internationally.” Despite being made aware of these concerns, Congress passed the ARP without including these longstanding, consensus pro-life riders that were included in every other COVID-19 relief bill passed before the ARP.



Language in a draft version of the bill that would have allowed funds to go directly to Planned Parenthood was removed in the Senate. The ARP will, unfortunately, allow public funds to pay premiums for health plans that include abortion coverage. There are other funding streams in the bill that could be used for abortion equipment, the use of telehealth to distribute abortion pills, and other items relating to abortion. These funding streams are exclusive to the ARP and are temporary, but failing to include these pro-life riders sets a bad precedent.



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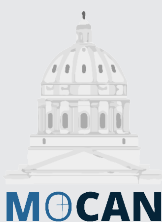
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Next MCC *Messenger* Focused on Equality Act

The second *MCC Messenger* of 2021 will dive into the Equality Act and the challenges it presents to religious liberty in America. In keeping with this year's new tradition, the printed publication will be paired with a new episode of MCC from the Capitol, the MCC's podcast, focused on the same subject. In this episode, MCC Executive Director Tyler McClay will talk with Mary Hasson, current Kate O'Beirne Fellow in Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., about the Equality Act.

Mary is an expert on topics related to women, faith, culture, family, sexual morality, and gender ideology. She has been a keynote speaker for the Holy See during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for the past three years, and is a consultant to the USCCB's Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth. She speaks frequently at national, regional, and diocesan conferences and conducts workshops for Catholic parishes and dioceses on sexuality, gender identity, and pastoral care. Mary is also the director of the Catholic Women's Forum, a network of Catholic professional women and scholars seeking to amplify the voice of Catholic women in support of human dignity, authentic freedom, and Catholic social teaching. We look forward to sharing this edition of *Messenger* and the next episode of MCC from the Capitol with you—be on the lookout for its publication in the coming months.

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