



# CONFERENCE CALL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

MARCH 2006

## Minimum-Wage Increase Veto Is Overridden Early in the 2006 Session

The Maryland Legislature, convening January 11 for its 2006 session, quickly took up high profile matters of the 2005 session that again drew concerted action by Maryland's bishops and Catholic faithful.

• **Minimum-wage victory**—The Senate on Jan. 17 joined the House in overriding Governor Robert Ehrlich's veto last year of a \$1 increase the state minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour. Maryland's bishops in the pastoral statement *Raising Maryland's Minimum Wage*:

*Protecting the Dignity of Work and the Basic Rights of Workers*, had urged Catholics to contact their lawmakers to support the increase. "The church teaches that the economy must serve the people, not the other way around," wrote Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, and Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli of Wilmington. "Work is more than a way to make a living; it is...continuing participation in God's act of creation."

The Maryland Catholic Conference was the principal interest-group proponent of the minimum wage increase, which will assist some 200,000 low-income families in Maryland. State minimum-wage increases do not negatively impact small businesses, noted Julie Varner, Conference associate director for Social Concerns. "Small business employers in higher minimum wage states generally fare better than small employers in other states," she said.



### Legislative Action

#### Embryonic Stem Cell Research, Marriage, Non-public Schools, Energy Aid Top Legislators' Agenda

The 2006 Legislative Session burst into action with hearings on embryonic stem cell research and cloning, the definition of marriage, nonpublic school textbooks and technology loans, and home heating assistance to low-income families.

**BAN HUMAN EMBRYONIC** stem cell research and cloning, the Conference urged Jan. 25 at joint hearings of key House and Senate Committees. Identical bills (HB 1/SB 144) would fund stem cell research on donated human embryos from in-vitro fertilization clinics, and permit human cloning. Research dollars "should instead be invested in offering patients the greatest hope—in adult stem cells," testified MCC

Continued on next page

### Death Penalty Is Stayed for Condemned Man

The Maryland Appeals Court on Feb. 6 halted the execution of Vernon Evans, a man convicted of killing two motel employees. The court will hear the appeal in May.

Maryland's bishops-Cardinals William Keeler and Theodore McCarrick and Bishop Michael Saltarelli-appealed to Governor Robert Ehrlich for clemency for Evans, as did the papal nuncio to the U.S and all American bishops. More than 500 Maryland Catholics asked the governor to commute Evans' death sentence to life imprisonment with no chance of parole.

The state must provide justice in the tragic deaths of David Piechowicz and Susan Kennedy, said Richard Dowling, MCC executive director. Maryland's option of punishing murder with a life sentence without parole punishes the murderer, protects society, and respects the life of all-including those who have committed grievous offenses.



Fortier

Respect for Life associate director Nancy Fortier. A quarter century of embryonic research in animals has “produced no treatments, only dead mice,” she said, but “tremendous progress has been made treating devastating illnesses and injuries using stem cells from patients’ own bodies, willing adult donors, and umbilical cord blood.”

Also opposing the bills were Dr. Lyle Sensenbrenner, Maryland Coalition for Ethical Research; Alfonso Gómez-Lobo, Ph.D., Georgetown University and the President’s Council on Bioethics; and Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, National Catholic Bioethics Center. More than 1,000 MCC Legislative Action Center users contacted their legislators to oppose the bills. While the House was poised to vote on HR 1 early this month, and the Senate Education & Health Committee approved SB 144 6-5 on Jan. 27, a significant number of senators vowed to filibuster the five-year, \$125 million plan. Also in the mix is Governor Ehrlich’s 2007 budget proposal of \$20 million for stem cell research; while superior to HB 1/SB 144, it causes concern for funding both adult and embryonic stem cell research.

Maryland voters overwhelmingly (79%) support a ban on human cloning, and by 69% oppose destroying human embryos in research. The Church supports stem cell research—through which many thousands of patients have been successfully treated—but opposes the small number of research programs that obtain stem cells by killing human embryos.

**TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE** would be defined and preserved as the union of one man and one woman by an amendment to the Maryland Constitution to be put before voters, under bills bouncing in and out of legislative consideration. A constitutional amendment was proposed after same-sex couples sued seeking “marriage” status, and a Baltimore City Circuit Court judge ruled that Maryland’s 1973 law defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman is unconstitutional discrimination based on gender.



Dowling

“The family, based on marriage, is a natural institution that is prior to the state and prior to the Church,” said the bishops of Baltimore, Washington, and Wilmington in an October pastoral letter distributed in most Maryland parishes. “The law grants it exclusive privileges because it is the seedbed of future generations.” In Jan. 31 testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, MCC

executive Director Richard Dowling said that “marriage should be above politics.” Media and legislative leadership attention to the election-year impact of the court ruling ignores “the erosive, corrosive effect the decision might have on an institution that been with us for as long as people have inhabited the earth. Let the people resolve the question by their votes” in a referendum, he said. Over 2,000 Catholic Maryland voters agreed, and said so in communications with their representatives.

Opposition to giving the legal status of marriage to persons in “de facto unions, whether heterosexual or homosexual, isn’t about denying them rights as citizens, or barring them from generally accessible public or private programs and services,” Dowling said. Rather “we affirm the historic understanding and status of marriage and believe it proper that that affirmation should reside in our state’s constitution.”

In January Maryland Catholics successfully urged legislators to sustain the governor’s vetoes of 2005 bills that would have granted persons in same-sex and unmarried opposite-sex relationships “life partnership” or “domestic partnership” certificates. The vetoed bills would have given certificate holders authority equal to that of married men and women in some health-care, post-mortem, and property-tax matters and, in medical decision-making, authority greater than family members.

**NONPUBLIC SCHOOL FAMILIES** save Maryland some \$1.3 billion a year in per-pupil costs, and \$4 million in the state’s 2007 budget for the Maryland Nonpublic Textbook/Technology Loan Program will help private-school families while in no way diminishing support for public schools.



Russell

Mary Ellen Russell, MCC associate director for Education and Family Life, testified Jan. 30 before the Senate Budget and Taxation Subcommittee on Education in support of the \$4 million allocation. The program provides a per-pupil allowance for nonreligious textbooks and computer hardware and software to students of nonpublic schools where tuition is below the average public school per-pupil cost (\$9,062 in 2003-04). While funding has been reduced for books and technology over the past four years, the number of nonpublic students benefiting from the program has grown by 10,000 pupils to 86,237 students in 321 schools. “Your support of the book and technology program is of vital importance to our state,” she told the subcommittee. Also supporting the program was the Maryland Nonpublic Schools Legislative Coalition, representing Christian, Jewish, and other nonpublic schools. The Conference is a coalition member.



## PEOPLE in the NEWS

### Former Speaker Casper Taylor Joins Conference Administrative Board

Casper R. Taylor, Jr., former Maryland Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, is the newest member of the Conference's Administrative Board. He was appointed by Cardinal William Keeler of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to a three-year term.



Taylor

A delegate for 28 years and House Speaker from 1994 to 2003, the Allegany County native has long been one of the most powerful political figures then in Maryland politics—and in policy matters, among the most influential. He belongs to St. Mary's Church, Cumberland.

Taylor succeeds Dr. Carol S. N. Abromaitis on the 17-member Administrative Board. "Sue Abromaitis

took every opportunity to affirm human life and the dignity of the human person in her work on the board," said Cardinal Keeler. "Her strong faith conviction and her keen understanding of the connection between Church teaching and the issues being debated in the public square were invaluable to the work of the Board. We



Abromaitis

cannot thank her enough." Dr. Abromaitis is a professor of English at Loyola College and parishioner at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Baltimore.

Administrative Board members, all of whom have special expertise in public-policy areas of interest to the Church, advise the Maryland-serving bishops who comprise the Conference Board of Governors.

### MCC Selects New Communications Director



Neuman

Connie Neuman is the new Maryland Catholic Conference communications director. A journalist and former communications director for Washington, D.C. associations, she will support Conference efforts to advocate Catholic values before

legislators and to provide Catholic voters with sound information on key government proposals.

"I'm blessed to be able to help foster gospel values in our state and in Congress through the Conference," said Neuman. "It's a joy to work with the Conference's highly effective staff and committed volunteers who do so much to persuade policymakers of the worth of gospel

truths in our pluralistic American society." A graduate of Marquette University, Milwaukee, and the adult faith program Education for Parish Service at Trinity University, Washington, D.C., she directed communications for associations of consumer product manufacturers and engineering companies. Former director of state government programs of the American Institute of Architects, she was a daily newspaper reporter, worked on Capitol Hill, and was managing editor of the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association's *Share The Word* magazine. A parishioner at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady Queen of Peace, Washington, D.C., she teaches the sacraments to children with special abilities.

### Lobby Night 2006 — Spectacular Success!

Read about it in the next issue of *Conference Call*.

Put **Monday, February 19, 2007** on your calendar now for Lobby Night '07!

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Maryland Catholic Conference

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**Legislative Action** — Continued from page 2

**ASSISTANCE TO LOW-INCOME FAMILIES** facing rising home energy bills drew Conference support at a hearing of the House Economic Matters Committee Feb. 2. MCC associate director for Social Concerns Julie Varner testified in support of a \$3 million increase in funding for the Electric Universal Service Program, which “helps tens of thousands of low-income Maryland families pay their electric bills.” Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have driven up energy costs for low-income families, “who already spend up to 27% of their income on essential home heating and energy,” she said. “Our Catholic tradition tells us that every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to what is required for human decency. A warm home is certainly such a fundamental need.”



Varner

## Make a Difference! Sign Up for the Legislative Action Center

You and your fellow parishioners care about the political issues that affect our lives—now and in the future. Join other Maryland Catholics in making your views known to your elected representatives.

- Log on to [www.mdccathcon.org](http://www.mdccathcon.org).
- Click on the Legislative Action Center box at Sign Up Today to register for the e-mail action network. You'll receive legislative action alerts on pending legislation on a range of social-justice and human-rights issues.
- After you register, you'll receive an e-mail confirmation. Respond by clicking your Reply button. You'll now be part of the Legislative Action Network.
- Whenever you receive an e-mail alert, you'll be able to respond immediately online. The LAC will automatically direct your communication to the elected officials who represent your state legislative or U.S. congressional district.
- To check for the latest issues, click the View Current Alerts box. **You'll make a difference!**

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