



Seeds of Justice

Sowers of Justice Newsletter

JUNE, 2010

Run, Walk, Run for Justice

U.S. Olympian and world class runner Jeff Galloway trains people to complete marathons. He developed the Galloway Run-Walk Method, which encourages walking for a minute on regular intervals as a break, rather than running non-stop for 26.2 miles. Coaches and runners agree that the Run-Walk Method can produce faster times and healthier running in marathoners.

Social change work is undoubtedly a marathon. We are running a race, but we must enter it with a plan. The finish line is forever in the horizon, and so we must train to run in such a way that is sustainable, healthy and effective.

At the end of the 2009 legislative session, at the moment we were crossing the finish line, everything changed. Health care for 70,000 of Minnesota's poorest adults was set to be eliminated via the line-item veto of GAMC, and nearly \$3 billion was unallotted by the Governor from Health & Human Services and other key state investments (later to be ruled unconstitutional by the Minnesota Supreme Court).

In many ways, the 2009 legislative session simply merged into the 2010 session. Off-session months are normally set aside for preparation, study, planning, organizing, conversation and relationship building in advance of the next legislative session. This past year; however, it was as if we finished a marathon and were then told at the finish line to just keep going. So, we did.

Some have argued that the best thing about the 2010 session of the Minnesota legislature is...that it's over.

While the staff at the Office for Social Justice is certainly pleased that the session has finally come to a close, we disagree that it is the best thing about the

2010 legislative session. The best part, hands down, was witnessing the growing influence and voice of the Catholic justice community in the parish and at the Capitol.

Over the past year, Sowers of Justice have worked to fundamentally change the conversation about low-income single adults, and turned out in force to support the restoration of health care to poor Minnesotans. You called, emailed, and wrote your legislators about the issues that impact Minnesota's poorest and most vulnerable residents. Thank you.

The upcoming election will have winners and losers. They say that "to the victors goes the spoils". In this case; however, it should read "to the victors goes responsibility to solve a \$5+ billion deficit in the 2011 legislative session". Unless the school shift is made permanent, and cuts to local aid and the unallotment (now legislated cuts) are made permanent, there will be a gigantic hole to fill. And this number doesn't even consider inflation. How we decide to balance that deficit will have enormous ripple effects for struggling Minnesotans, so we must be prepared to continue our work toward the common good.

As we reflect on the past year and the 2010 legislative session and cast our eyes to the horizon ahead, it would seem wise to create a Catholic justice advocacy angle on the Galloway Run-Walk Method. Seeking justice in our community is indeed a marathon - and one worth running.

Take this summer to walk in justice, rest and rejuvenate. Then, come fall, let's take off running again.

Patrick Ness
Public Policy Manager

2010 Session Update

The following is a recap of the 2010 legislative session coupled with a final update on our advocacy agenda. While there were many setbacks, there were also great steps forward this year. As a people of faith, we will continue our collective work in the years ahead to achieve a more just society that expresses our values of human dignity and a preferential option for the poor. Here's how our issues fared in the 2010 session.

When the House and Senate gavelled to order on February 4 for the 2010 legislative session, Minnesota was facing a \$1.2 billion budget deficit (later revised down to "only" \$994 million). Our state's economy was in a slump, unemployment was high, and funding for General Assistance Medical Care was set to expire, leaving thousands without health care.

Lawmakers hit the ground running, and promised to fix all of these problems. By late March, several key pieces of legislation had already passed, including a \$680 million bonding bill, a package of tax incentives for businesses and a compromise plan to restore partial funding to GAMC. The legislature also passed a bill that solved roughly one-third of the deficit through spending cuts.

By April, the legislature appeared to be on track for an early finish. Then, officials received word that \$408 million in expected federal funding would not arrive in time for lawmakers to use it in the budget. Eight days later, the Minnesota Supreme Court threw out the Governor's \$2.7 billion in unallotments from 2009, turning the entire session on its head.

The sudden ballooning of the state's deficit in the final days of session nearly derailed four months of hard work, but a last-minute deal between legislative leaders and Governor Pawlenty was eventually reached. After gaveling the regular session to an end just before midnight May 16, minutes later at 12:01 a.m. on May 17, the state's first special session in three years was called to let the House and Senate pass one final budget-balancing bill.

The House and Senate will reconvene Jan. 4, 2011, when legislators will begin work on erasing a \$5.8

billion deficit projected for Fiscal Years 2012-13. In the meantime, an election will determine who controls the House and Senate as well as the Governor's office next year. The winners have a lot of work ahead of them.

2010 Legislative Priorities— Session Summary:

Goal: Protect Public Assistance programs from dangerous budget cuts.

Outcome: The final global agreement and health and human services budget bill included:

- No cuts to General Assistance (GA);
- Only one cut to the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) – a reduction to \$25 of the \$50 a month bonus available to families who leave MFIP with a job.
- The continued unallotment of Emergency General Assistance, but funding is restored in July 2010.
- The asset test for food stamps was eliminated; to be eligible a household must demonstrate that they have income less than 165% of the poverty line (\$30,211 for a family of 3).

OSJ and the Sowers successfully defeated attempts to cut MFIP grants to families who receive disability payments and defeated attempts to penalize MFIP recipients in public housing.

Goal: Restore health care coverage to those losing General Assistance Medical Care.

Outcome: Due to a negotiated agreement between the governor and the legislature, Governor Pawlenty or the next governor has the option to transfer adults from GAMC to either Minnesota-Care or Medical Assistance. The decision can be made by executive order to the Health and Human Services commissioner without going back to the legislature. However, this decision must be made by January 15.

In the short term, the state will proceed with cooperating hospitals to put the compromise GAMC plan into place. \$10 million more was added to the reimbursement fund to assist hospitals who are not part of the four coordinating care

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hospitals (see below) from having to pay for all of the care as charity care. The final legislation allows for hospitals to cap the number of people they must serve. 20,000 people are expected to be covered in the four hospitals contracting with the state: HCMC, Regions, North Memorial Medical Center, Fairview Ridges/University.

Goal: Support Federal and State Immigration Reform legislation.

Outcome: Representative Drazkowski and several other representatives in the House minority introduced a bill based on the recent immigration legislation signed into law in Arizona. The Arizona bill, opposed by the United States Catholic Bishops, is the most aggressive anti-immigrant legislation passed in recent memory. If enacted in Minnesota, it would increase racial profiling, harassment, and further push undocumented immigrants into the shadows of society.

Law enforcement agencies, religious organizations, city leaders, legal advocates, immigrant rights groups and the Star Tribune editorial board came out strongly against Rep. Drazkowski's bill. Thankfully, as time was short, elements of this legislation were not attached as amendments to final bills this session. We intend to defeat the full package if introduced during the 2011 legislative session.

Goal: Balance the state budget through tax revenues and tax fairness.

Outcome: The Governor vetoed all legislation that included tax increases.

Goal: Support funding for \$30 million in non-profit bonds for the construction of affordable housing and support \$10 million in funding in the bonding bill for renovation of public housing.

Outcome: Unfortunately, none of these investments were included in the state bonding bill signed by the Governor on March 15. The legislature passed a \$1 billion bonding bill, but the Governor line item vetoed \$320 million in projects, some of them for housing, before signing the bill.

Goal: Maintain current levels of funding, co-pay rates and eligibility levels for the Child Care

Assistance Program, and ensure reimbursement rates for child care centers/homes are maintained at current levels or modestly increased.

Outcome: There were no cuts to the basic sliding fee child care program other than taking child care money, not yet allocated to counties with waiting lists (\$2.5 million), to bulk up the general fund.

Goal: Support the passage of reform legislation that limits the interest rates, fees, and penalties at payday lending institutions.

Outcome: The PayDay lending reform bill passed the House Labor & Consumer Protection Division and the House Commerce Committee this session. The bill had a more difficult road in Senate committees, and never received a hearing. While significant progress was made to better position the bill for next year, it did not advance further this session.

Goal: Make felony-level charges for 16-17 year olds public data only if the final adjudication is felony level, rather than a plea agreement. Restrict public access to juvenile records.

Outcome: After passing the House and Senate, the Governor vetoed this bill. In his veto letter, he cast the entire proposal as assisting predatory sexual offenders.

The bill passed by the legislature would have closed court proceedings for 16 and 17-year-olds, except in violent or severe cases where a judge determines the case should be open to the public. In cases that remain closed to the public, the record could also be more easily expunged. The bill also required substance abuse screenings in addition to mental health screenings for juveniles in detention facilities.

Goal: End poverty by 2020 by passing recommendations of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty.

Outcome: The legislature passed the Ladders Out of Poverty Task Force legislation, but did not pass Poverty Impact Statement Legislation.

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

*Sow for yourselves justice,
reap the fruit of faithful love;*

*Break up for yourselves
a new field, for it is
time to seek the Lord,
until the Lord comes
and rains down justice
upon you.*

Hosea, 10:12



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NEW EMAILS
Effective August 1, 2010

Please update your records to reflect the following:

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If you have any questions or trouble, please contact our office at 651-291-4477.

Prepare for a SEEDS newsletter makeover
on the next issue!



We are disappointed and saddened to see Gary Wells leave us after twelve years with Catholic Charities. He has helped us stay logistically sound and fiscally organized. We have been blessed and wish him many graces in the future.