



# CCI February Newsletter 2011

*Hello!*

As the first week of February was Catholic Schools Week – and Blizzard 2011 Week –this February edition of the education newsletter is coming to you late. Still, I want to take a moment to look back and thank United States Congressman Dan Lipinski (IL-3) for introducing House Resolution 61 honoring the outstanding work of Catholic schools and celebrating Catholic Schools Week. The resolution expresses support for “the vital contributions of the thousands of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States” and “the key role they play in promoting and ensuring a brighter, stronger future for the nation.”

This is the fifth year in a row that Congressman Lipinski has introduced such a resolution. On January 24, he paid tribute to the remarkable success of America’s Catholic schools and the influence of his own Catholic school education in a speech on the floor on the United State House of Representatives:

“As a proud graduate of St. Symphorosa Grammar School and St. Ignatius College Prep, I was born and raised and live in the Chicago Archdiocese, which still has one of the most successful school systems in the country,” Congressman Lipinski said. “America’s Catholic schools produce graduates that have the skills and strength of character needed by our businesses, governments, and communities. In 2009, Catholic school students contributed about half a million hours of service to their communities and parishes. Catholic school students, on average, surpass other students in math, science, and reading in the three grade levels tested by the NAEP test. The graduation rate for Catholic high school students is 99 percent, and 97 percent of graduates go on to college or technical schools.”

Thank you Congressman Lipinski.

Here in Springfield, the 96<sup>th</sup> General Assembly spent early January completing its lame-duck session with a series of major policy initiatives. The newly-elected 97<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was sworn in on January 12, and was scheduled to begin work last week, but due to the blizzard, the legislature did not convene. Accordingly, this newsletter will look at (1) the major outcome of the last week of the lame-duck session; (2) the Catholic Conference of Illinois’ (CCI) legislative agenda for the 96<sup>th</sup> General Assembly; and (3) a short update on administrative issues.

## Legislative Issues

**Tax Hike** – In its last days, the lame-duck General Assembly approved a massive personal and corporate income tax hike. The personal income tax rate will go from 3 to 5 percent. After four years, 1.25 percent of the increase is scheduled to expire and an additional .5 percent will expire in 14 years. The corporate rate will go from 4.8 to 7 percent. After four years, this rate is scheduled to fall back to 5.6 percent. Despite our long and concentrated efforts, the package did not include any expansion of existing tax credits. CCI supported an expansion of the education expense tax credit, and this proposal passed the Senate, but the dynamics of the political situation surrounding final passage meant the tax increase bills were scrubbed of all credits – ours and a proposed property tax credit.

The tax increase is intended to address the state's structural deficit, pay off the backlog of bills (although an accompanying borrowing measure to expedite those payments failed) and return the state to line-item budgeting. However, the amount generated versus the budget deficit, and the included spending cap that attempts to restrain government spending growth to 2 percent a year for the next four years, will probably preclude most new spending and programs. Also, a proposed \$1 a pack cigarette tax increase, which was designed to funnel another \$377 million into education funding, failed.

The legislature will return to line-item budgeting now that the tax increases have passed. CCI has begun pursuing a legislative strategy designed to restore funding to our education programs, and we will soon ask you and your networks to participate in that strategy.

**Legislative Priorities for the 96<sup>th</sup> General Assembly** – CCI's Department of Education has approved our legislative priority list for the 96<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, covering 2011-12. The list is straightforward:

- Advocate for the creation of an Individual/Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program and/or for the expansion of the \$500 Education Expense Tax Credit by raising the cap, increasing the percentage of qualified expenses and including refundability so that low-income families can benefit.
- Work to restore funding to the Textbook Loan, Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant and the Parent/Guardian Transportation Reimbursement programs.
- Maintain a smooth and cooperative relationship between the State Board of Education and Catholic schools to ensure an effective state recognition program for nonpublic schools.
- Pursue and support other school choice options – such as voucher programs – as opportunities exist.

Obviously, these are difficult goals. The state's long and severe budget shortfall caused drastic cuts throughout the budget and programs beneficial to Catholic schools were not been spared. And despite the state's new revenues, the remaining deficit and spending caps ensure this effort will be difficult and require a lot of work, here in Springfield and in local legislative districts. Still, most of these programs have significant backing in the legislature, and a return to line-item budgeting does offer hope for restored funding. In the next few weeks, we expect to introduce bills in the legislature to establish a tax credit backed scholarship program and to restore funding to grant programs serving Catholic schools. The bill numbers will be included in the March newsletter with action alerts to follow.

**Senate Bill 136** – Senator Ed Maloney (D-Chicago) has introduced this legislation into the new General Assembly. The bill seeks to require parents of private school children and home-schooled children to register with the state. CCI has reached out to Senator Maloney to discuss his intentions and indicate our likely opposition to the bill as introduced.

## Administrative Issues

**State Recognition** – Through hard work and persistence, we have finally broken through with ISBE and made some major progress on state recognition. At a meeting in January, we agreed to (1) a final version of the probe document to be used in state recognition visits, which included most of the changes we suggested, (2) several additions to the “proof indicator” (evidence) lists for the probe document which will help school administrators prepare for visits, (3) a schedule of school visits for the remaining school year, and (4) language for changes to the administrative rules to ensure that in the future visits can take place throughout the school year and that recognition status will last until the following year's status is determined.

The state recognition process for nonpublic schools has been erratic since ISBE's 2003 decision to shut it down. Our subsequent passage of the law requiring ISBE to provide state registration and recognition for nonpublic schools helped but did not solve the problems. Since then, we have gone through 4 division administrators at ISBE, several reviews of the Policies and Guidelines Manual, an administrative rule-making process, a new application process and real struggles in communicating with ISBE. It has been difficult, but we are closer than ever to having a solid state recognition process, built upon statute and administrative rules, in place and consistently carried out. And we accomplished this while maintaining the recognition status of our schools and even adding some new ones to the list.

**New Administrative Rules on Principal Preparation** – Early in January, ISBE issued revisions to their initial draft of the proposed rules on principal preparation programs within Illinois. You will recall from earlier newsletters that CCI was involved in the drafting of the underlying legislation and in the

rulemaking process. The revisions addressed the primary concerns CCI raised in public comments, and we are satisfied with the outcome. Please contact me if you have additional questions.

**Facebook Page for Catholic School Advocacy** - To augment the LAP network and monthly newsletter, and eager to invite more into new technologies, I have setup a Facebook page for Catholic School Advocacy in Illinois. Facebook users simply need to look up the page at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Springfield-IL/CCI-Catholic-School-Advocacy-in-Illinois/124415842483?created>

or do a search on Facebook of Catholic School Advocacy. Being a fan of the page will allow you to receive updates, action alerts and access to other things, such as pictures of events and rallies as well as links to pertinent articles and videos.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of Catholic schools!

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