

Our Cherished Right, Our Solemn Duty

By the Catholic Bishops of New York State

Every four years, 12 months prior to the presidential election, the Bishops of the United States issue a statement calling Catholics to faithful citizenship. Simply put, faithful citizenship refers to our duty as Catholics to be full participants in the public square in order to make our nation and the world a better and more just place. With this duty comes the responsibility to exercise our right to vote and to be engaged in the political process. This right did not come easily, having been bought with the blood of our forebears and protected through the centuries by our Constitution and the men and women in uniform who defend it.

We Catholics are called to look at politics as we are called to look at everything – through the lens of our faith. While we are free to join any political party that we choose or none at all, we must be cautious when we vote not to be guided solely by party loyalty nor by self interest. Rather, we should be guided in evaluating the important issues facing our state and nation by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Church.

Our national and state elected officials have profound influence on countless matters of great importance, such as the right to life, issues of war and peace, the education of children and how we treat the poor and vulnerable. We must look at all of these issues as we form our consciences in preparation for Election Day, November 4.

It is the rare candidate who will agree with the Church on every issue. But as the U.S. Bishops' recent document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (www.faithfulcitizenship.org) makes clear, not every issue is of equal moral gravity. The inalienable right to life of every innocent human person outweighs other concerns where Catholics may use prudential judgment, such as how best to meet the needs of the poor or to increase access to health care for all.

The right to life is the right through which all others flow. To the extent candidates reject this fundamental right by supporting an objective evil, such as legal abortion, euthanasia or embryonic stem cell research, Catholics should consider them less acceptable for public office. As *Faithful*

Citizenship teaches, “Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.”

These are complex times, so our task is not light. Educating ourselves for the presidential election is somewhat easier than doing so for the congressional or state legislative races, mainly because the candidates' positions are generally better known. The presidential candidates of both major parties have legislative voting records which often provide valuable insight. In addition, their campaign Web sites, debates and news coverage regularly highlight the differences of the two on the issues.

It is often more difficult to get as good a grasp on the positions of incumbent congressional representatives and state legislators, not to mention their challengers. (How many of us cannot even name our state Senator or Assembly Member, let alone their electoral opponents?) News accounts of positions are harder to come by, and voting records on important issues are often lacking. So the task of doing due diligence can be truly challenging. Yet our state is facing many critical issues which are of vital concern to faithful Catholics, and it is absolutely necessary for good citizens to pay attention to these races and to vote accordingly for the better candidates. You can find all of the candidates for elected office at the New York State Catholic Conference Web site (www.nyscatholic.org).

Many of the most compelling moral issues of the day play out at the state level. Commonsense restrictions on abortion, whether or not to employ the death penalty, issues related to same-sex “marriage” and civil unions, parental rights in education, programs to serve the poor, access to health insurance – all of these debates occur in the halls of our state Capitol in Albany. Your vote for State Senator and Assembly Member may be as critical as your vote for President of the United States.

We set forth below potential questions for candidates on a variety of critical issues, and we

urge you to learn where *all* the candidates for *every* office stand with regard to them. This list is by no means exhaustive, but our hope is that it serves as a valuable tool in forming your consciences as you make your decisions in the voting booth as Catholic faithful citizens.

While we as Church officials cannot and do not endorse candidates for office, we encourage you to properly form your conscience by reflecting on the moral and social teachings of our Church and we strongly urge you to vote on November 4. For when we vote, we are exercising our cherished right and our solemn duty as Americans and as Catholics.

Important Questions for Political Candidates

The Right to Life

Do you agree with the need to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which struck down all state laws criminalizing abortion and established a woman's "right" to abort her unborn child in the womb?

Do you oppose the state's "Reproductive Health & Privacy Protection Act" or the federal "Freedom of Choice Act" which both go beyond *Roe v. Wade*, guaranteeing a fundamental right to abortion with no restrictions or regulations?

Do you support a ban on physician-assisted suicide?

Do you oppose government funding for human embryonic stem cell research?

Do you oppose the death penalty?

Parental Rights in Education

Do you support the right of all parents – especially poor parents – to be provided with the means (such as education tax credits) to choose the most appropriate school for their child, including a religious or independent school?

Do you support restoring full state reimbursement on mandates in religious and independent schools?

Protecting Marriage

Do you support maintaining the historic understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman?

Immigration Reform

Do you support immigration reform that regularizes the situation for undocumented immigrants already in this country?

Do you oppose punishing charitable organizations which provide social services to undocumented persons?

Access to Health Care

Do you support legislative action to provide universal access to health care?

Protecting the Poor

Do you support an increase in New York State's public assistance grant, which has not been raised since 1990?

Do you support an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, available as refunds to families with the greatest need?

Religious Liberty

Do you support the right of faith-based health and human service providers to offer services to the community in accord with their religious beliefs?

Do you support the right of faith-based health and human service providers to make employment and employee benefits decisions in accord with their religious beliefs?

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