

# ★ Legislative Report

By Dr. William Rainford  
Legislative Liaison

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Rainford, a professor of government policy and research in the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, Boise State University, is the legislative liaison for the Diocese of Boise and Catholic Charities of Idaho.



The 2005 Legislative Session will end in early April. Looking back over the session, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise and Catholic Charities of Idaho were successful in advocating for families in Idaho on several proposals. Dr. Rainford, working with his student intern from the School of Social Work at Boise State University, Alicia Records, spent much time in the Statehouse representing the official position of Catholics.

Advocacy was framed in Catholic Social Teaching, which can be reviewed online at <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/>.

## Session to end: Some victories for poor

Of primary concern was expanding access to medical care for low-income families in Idaho. Not only does appropriate, affordable, accessible medical care benefit families, it expands economic opportunity for all Idahoans through a healthy, productive labor force.

Dr. Rainford and allied advocates fought against legislation that would have created entrenched barriers to medical care for undocumented immigrants. The effort by the advocacy collaborative successfully stopped the proposal from leaving the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. As Rainford testified, solving the issues of illegal immigration by denying basic human rights to undocumented immigrants is no solution.

Another success in the area of medical care occurred when a bill was proposed requiring Medicaid patients to pay a portion of their medical care. Low-income families, most of who work, cannot afford co-payments for medical care. Requiring a co-pay would contribute to the syndrome known as "heat or eat" in which families must choose which fiscal obligations they will pay and which they will sacrifice. A \$10 co-pay for a visit to the doctor would likely compel a mother to skip a meal so her

child could obtain medical care. Strong advocacy in opposition to the proposal killed the legislative proposal.

The Idaho Legislature defeated a bill that would allow working families above the Medicaid income level, but who cannot afford medical insurance, to participate in Medicaid by paying a small premium. Rainford argued the proposal fosters economic independence through increased medical care for working families. Some 250,000 Idahoans do not now have medical insurance. More than 80 percent of them work. A high proportion of the uninsured are children. Providing working families with access to Medicaid through a "buy-in" would have made major inroads to ending the medical insurance crisis in Idaho.

In an effort to address the medical insurance crisis, AARP offered a proposal to create a drug prescription program for working families in Idaho who are above the Medicaid income level limit but who do not have private insurance. The program would have required a \$10 administrative fee for participation. Families would then be able to purchase discounted drugs through their local pharmacists. The State of Idaho would procure those drugs from pharmaceuticals at lower prices

through negotiated purchases. In a classic "David and Goliath" confrontation, AARP and the Catholic Church faced the behemoth pharmaceutical industry before the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. Unfortunately, the industry, with all its fiscal might proved too big for the advocates. The bill was sent back to AARP for negotiations with the pharmaceutical industry. At the end of the session, no new bill has been proposed.

The battle has not ended. AARP, the Roman Catholic Diocese, and other advocacy organizations will continue to work on creating programmatic relief for working families who are uninsured.

Looking towards the 2006 Legislative Session, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise and Catholic Charities of Idaho plan to continue the effort to expand economic opportunities for working families. Proposals will be drafted that will provide access to medical care, increased educational support, creation of jobs that pay living wages, and home ownership for low-income families in Idaho. As these proposals are developed, they will be reported in the Idaho Catholic Register.

Anyone interested in discussing ideas can contact Dr. Rainford at (208) 890-0448 or at [willrainford@boisestate.edu](mailto:willrainford@boisestate.edu).