



Catholic Civil Rights League

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Federal election: Background on topics of interest

As the campaign develops for the federal election May 2, there is no shortage of information and opinion in the media about issues such as the economy, the environment, health care, military commitments or foreign aid.

Issues with a clear-cut relationship to Catholic teaching concerning the right to life or the dignity of the individual do not loom large on the radar screen at the present time. Nevertheless, some did emerge in the most recent Parliament. For the information of our members, here is some background about issues where the League is particularly knowledgeable.

Bill C-389, which would have added “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination in the federal human rights code and Criminal Code, was passed by the House of Commons in February but died on the Senate Order Paper with the election call. The League’s aim was not to deny anyone their fundamental equality, a principle which no Christian should ever question. Rather, our objection to C-389 was the addition of a very subjective category to what has historically been an objective set of criteria for bringing human rights complaints.

[Roxanne’s Law](#) to prevent coercion in abortion caused some disagreement within the pro-life movement as some were dissatisfied with its exemption for abortion providers and arguably narrow focus on those unborn children whose mothers face pressure and coercion to have abortions they would not otherwise have. The League believed the proposal drew needed attention to a neglected area of the abortion issue, and would have preferred to see it passed to a committee stage where any problems with the bill could have been addressed. It was voted down 178-97 (29 abstentions) on second reading December 15, 2010.

The Maternal Health Initiative, Canada’s contribution to the G-8 program for international development, was meant to focus on providing health care for women and their children, especially through the provision of medicines, clean

water and clinics. Before long it became a lightning rod for abortion activists, in Parliament and in the media. While the League was glad that a [motion to fund abortions](#) under the program was defeated, we noted that it was a minor victory given that funding is provided within Canada for abortions at any stage of pregnancy.

Bloc MP Francine Lalonde again introduced a private members’ bill (C-384) to liberalize Canada’s laws on physician-assisted suicide. It was defeated on second reading last April, but the debate helped raise awareness of the need for more and better palliative care facilities in Canada. The League submitted a brief to the all-party committee struck to study the question. The Bill may also have played a role in educating people about what is really meant by euthanasia and assisted suicide; both refer to direct acts committed with the purpose of ending life.

Of less prominence in the most recent Parliament, but still of concern to the League, the public expression of religious belief on contentious topics can still be challenged under Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA). Cases appear to have been put on hold since one of the Canadian Human Rights Commission’s own commissioners in September, 2009 declared Section 13 to be in violation of the Charter. The League has repeatedly asked for the repeal of Section 13, in calls to the Prime Minister and Justice Minister. Any limitation on a Charter right such as free speech should be heard in a true court, not a tribunal designed to resolve disputes in workplaces and the provision of goods and services. There are several articles about it available on our website by searching under “Section 13.”

This is by no means an exhaustive list of issues that may be of interest to our members. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops released a voters’ guide that includes suggestions on the right to life and a wide range of social justice concerns. The non-partisan website [How’d they Vote](#) includes an easily-searched list of all recent Bills.

League to intervene in Quebec Schools case to support parents

The League announced March 30 that its joint application to intervene in the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) appeal in the case of Quebec families seeking exemption from Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture (ECR) Course has been accepted.

As part of the Christian Group for Parental Rights in Education, the League will file a factum in conjunction with The Association of Catholic Parents of Quebec (APCQ), the Faith and Freedom Alliance and the Coptic Christian Association of Greater Montreal. Its factum will emphasize the right of parents to direct the religious education of their children.

The appeal stems from the case of a Drummondville, Quebec family that sought an exemption from the ECR course but was refused by its local school board. Other applications to intervene in the SCC appeal were granted to groups including the Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association and Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Canadian Council of Christian Charities, Christian Legal Fellowship, Coalition for Liberty in Education, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and Association of Quebec School Boards.

Appeal scheduled in prostitution case

The League announced March 11 that its application to intervene jointly in the Ontario Court of Appeal in the appeal of an Ontario court ruling that would remove the remaining legal restrictions on prostitution has been accepted.

"When the case was first heard, our joint intervention with Christian Legal Fellowship and REAL Women was the only one to speak directly to the shared morality of Canadians in opposing this change," noted League Executive Director Joanne McGarry. "We're pleased that the court will allow us to bring this much-needed dimension to the appeal level."

The case was initiated several years ago by a group of prostitutes seeking to legalize living off the avails, keeping a common bawdy house and soliciting for purposes of prostitution of the Criminal Code. Much of their argument emphasized their belief that they would be safer if they could operate openly.

Last September 28, in Ontario Superior Court, Justice Susan Himel ordered that the pertinent sections of the Criminal Code infringe the Canadian Charter of Rights

and Freedom in a manner that cannot be justified in a free and democratic society, and are therefore unconstitutional.

Media Watch

Radio advertising challenged

The League has filed a complaint with the Advertising Standards Council concerning some billboards by Virgin Radio in Toronto. [The ads](#), one of which faces a Catholic high school and others that are located close to residential neighbourhoods, feature obscene slogans and content demeaning to women. We filed our complaint under the ASC's "inappropriate portrayals" guideline, and await their response.

Sunday openings begin to include banks

TD-Canada Trust's current advertising campaign promotes Sunday openings at some of its branches. The League contacted the bank early in March to express our belief that Sunday should be a common pause day for as many people as possible, which is difficult to achieve when large employers require their staff to work. In response, the bank said its managers had "thought long and hard about what this would mean to our employees as well as our customers" but basically went with the change at branches (about 300) where customers said they wanted it. Like other Sunday retail openings, this one will only stop if those customers don't show up! The League's column in the Catholic Register March 9 discussed Sunday openings in greater detail.

Let the League know: Articles, cartoons and advertising that you believe have anti-Catholic content should be sent to ccrl@ccrl.ca to help us respond in a timely way.

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