

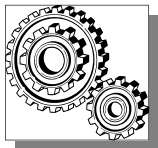
Christian Action Ministry Newsletter

Involving the Christian in Community Action

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In the Works

Rescheduling David Barton

Are you interested in becoming involved? CAM is looking for interested and active people to act as liaisons to their church, helping to keep the Christian community informed. Contact CAM at 372-6442.

Pending Legislation

By
Lauston Stephens

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” (*Romans 13:1*)

The power and authority entrusted to our elected officials belongs to God and they will be judged for their stewardship of it. Some of the representatives and senators we send to Montpelier understand this. Some do not.

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” (*Proverbs 29:2*)

A review of pending legislation can show how much rejoicing or mourning may be in store for the people of this state. At this writing, over 300 bills have been introduced in the house or senate. Not all will become law. Space does not permit us to discuss each one. This is just one review. You may want to go to <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/> and

do your own. Bills range from the innocuous H.0184, designating green and gold as the state colors, to the ominous H.0044 and S.0063, seeking to codify physician-assisted suicide. Here are a few general observations and a look at specific bills.

A first thing to notice is the large number of bills that address environmental issues. It

Noah in how we treat coyotes (S.0014). Maybe we'd like to idle our engines to have heat in our vehicles (H.0058, H.0069, S.0013, S.0025) Maybe we don't want to be told how to fertilize a lawn or golf course (H.0151, S.0068) Maybe we are like Paul:

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” (*Romans 7:22-23*)

Maybe we want to use cell phones while driving (H.0117, S.020) and think we can trust God and our “God-given common

sense” to protect us on the road. Maybe God would rather use some new laws to work the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” in us. Before we seek to examine the motives of lawmakers, we should examine our own.

The intent of H.0027 (tire deposits), H.0070, H.0104,



“Government’s view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.”

Ronald Reagan

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H.0105 & H.0127 (renewable energy) and several other bills is to achieve new good in stewardship of the earth. This is a worthy goal, whatever the worldview of those that draft the bills. Not that we should give carte blanche for any “green” bill without examination. S.0044 has the high goal of a common assets trust. Taken to the extreme, it is the groundwork for charging you for the air you breathe.

“Render honor to whom honor is due.” Veterans and military personnel are acknowledged in the areas of property (H.0036, H.0242) and income (H.0083) taxes, medical services (H.0138), education (H.0177), hunting and fishing licenses (H.0200) and vehicle plates (H.0080). These are all house bills without a senate counterpart. They could die for lack of attention. If you see these in the light of Romans 13:7, encourage your senators to act on them.

Many readers will be heartened to learn of H.0009 (School choice), H.0017 (Textbooks for home study students) and H.0029 (co-curricular activities.) Each bill has a single sponsor. If you value the intent of these bills, thank and encourage representatives Otterman, Donahue and Jewett in their efforts.

Consolidation of school districts (H.0055, H.0179) and a statewide teachers’ contract (H.0178) show political will to

seriously address the high and growing cost of public education. The number of school districts in Vermont is extraordinarily high for the number of students. Act 60 took away one check on school boards in negotiating teacher contracts: “We can only afford so much.” Since “gold towns” would send money, restraint was cast off in many towns and overall spending on education jumped. Teachers that were content with the balance they had between pay and small town community life seemingly could now have it all. These bills will be opposed as a loss of local control, but the intent to better manage the expense of public education and the effect of Act 60 has already undermined local control. The “Brigham” ruling was not according to original intent, but the largest single expense should be negotiated where the money is collected.

Note a trend in several bills addressing crime and punishment. S.0001 would raise the age of “youthful” offender from 17 to 25. S.0004 would raise from 10 to 18 the possible age of a victim of child abuse. S.0005 removes the age limit (28) as a guideline in deferring sentencing and placing someone on probation. H.0135 raises from 21 to 25 the upper age at which an inmate is required to work toward a GED. H.0052 raises the upper limit for a juvenile delinquent from 16 to 18 and puts the delinquent in family court until age 21 “if it finds that doing so is

in the minor’s best interest.” Under current law, a victim of child abuse has until age 24 to charge their assailant. H.0159 removes all statues of limitations on child abuse. H.0258 raises the age for tobacco use to 21. Without comment on any of the individual bills here, we see a dimming view of the maturing of our youth. Some will say this more parental approach by the state shows enlightenment. Is that the case, or is it a sign of the decline of our national character?

For the “slippery slope” award, we can nominate the sponsors of S.0007 that would change the statute on “Marijuana Use by Persons with Severe Illness,” to “Marijuana for Medical Use.” As indicated, the bill broadens the medical conditions allowed. H.0082 gives a piece of the health insurance pie to naturopathic physicians. Catamount Health may be picking up the tab for your massage as well as your reefer(?). Of course, Christians want to relieve suffering. Do you rejoice or mourn over this approach?

S.0051 and H.0228 propose “to include gender identity as a protected class in the state’s anti-discrimination statutes.” What do Christians want for someone who has a gender identity issue? Do we want them discriminated against in housing, employment, etc.? No, of course not, but it should not be against the law for us to teach, “I’m not okay, you’re not okay.” The two bills were

the same when introduced and use the phrase, “regardless of the individual’s assigned sex at birth.” Should we tell them Who assigned their gender to them, *before* birth? If the state embraced a biblical worldview, legislation would provide ministry to anyone with a gender identity issue. “I’m an accident of evolution, you’re an accident of evolution,” is an approach we mourn.

H.0122 allows anyone to walk in off the street, fill out a form, ante up \$25, and become a temporary “officiant” at a marriage or civil union. Current law recognizes members of the judiciary and clergy for the purpose of solemnizing a marriage. It even provides for three recognized sects that revere marriage but do not have an official clergy. Members of both the judiciary and the clergy are examined and “solemnized” in their respective offices before they solemnize any marriages. This bill devalues marriage and community. It views marriage as the personal concern of two individuals and isolates it from society in all respects except giving access to the legal and financial privileges afforded. We have to ask, “Who intends to use such a law?” People with no use for Church or State want all the benefits of community without any commitment except to themselves. The State has an interest in stability. Would such a marriage, “solemnized” by such an “officiant” really provide stability for the spouses and what



“It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a Free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defense of it.

George Washington

children there may be? No doubt, the sponsors intended good for some few souls at odds with society. The ministry of reconciliation is needed here, not legislation of isolation. Beyond mournful, this bill is a grievous move toward “every man [doing] that which was right in his own eyes.”

Eleven of 30 senators and five of 150 representatives have sponsored a bill (S.0063, H.0044) to provide for physician-assisted suicide. The bill has numerous “safe guards” against misuse. The sponsors clearly understand there is the potential of serious abuse of such a law. The bill also relies heavily on the experience in Oregon and reports, “In 2005, 92 percent of the patients who used medication under the Death with Dignity Act were in hospice care.” We have to ask, “Who is running the hospice centers? Is there a waiting line and do they make more money if beds become available more quickly?” Beyond that, is it really merciful to help someone enter eternity sooner? What if the suffering that awaits them is far worse than anything possible in this life? At the end of life and in great pain, people may cry out to God or they may curse God. The State plays God to sanction ending this life, yet it provides no preparation for the next.

Seven years ago, in response to a court order, the legislature

created civil unions. S.0080 and H.0275 have been introduced this year, “...to permit same-sex couples to marry and to allow clergy the right to refuse to solemnize a marriage...” There is no legal requirement for this bill. No judge has ruled that civil unions falls short of the court order. Sponsors of the bill claim they expect no action on it this year. The governor says there are many other things the lawmakers should be working on and would not want to see the state embroiled as it was seven years ago. President pro tem of the senate was reported to say that it was a waste of time. It is out of step with the rest of the country. Twelve states ban any recognition of any form of same-sex unions including civil union, twenty-six states have adopted amendments to their state constitution prohibiting same sex marriage, and another twenty states have enacted statutory defense of marriage acts.

So why has it been introduced? It begins, “This act may be referred to and cited as An Act to Protect Religious Freedom and Promote Equality in Civil Marriage.” The first concern of our legislators appears to be religious freedom. We should be grateful, living so close to Canada where people are taken to court for refusing on religious grounds to marry gay couples.

Given that spin and the asser-

tion that it won’t be acted on this year, nor maybe next year, this is a “sleeper” bill. The perception of the proponents of gay marriage seems to be that traditionalists and religious conservatives primarily fear being involved. Precluding legal action against them may allay fears. Stretching legislation over time builds the appearance that it has gained acceptance. The aim appears to be that at some time in the future, it will be passed, perhaps without much hue and cry and, at long last, same-sex couples can marry, ending the current “separate but equal” arrangement.

A more careful reading of the bill, however, shows that there will still be a “separate but equal” arrangement, but with the shoe on the other foot, due to the addition of one word to the statutes: “...a town clerk shall issue to a person a civil marriage license.” The addition of this word shows recognition that there is not going to be agreement on how marriage may be defined. All marriages will become civil marriages and, in the name of religious liberty, some will be marriages as more narrowly defined by various, presumably minor, religious sects. Traditional, biblical marriage will be marginalized.

Title 15, sub-section 8 of the Vermont statutes, added just 8 years ago, now reads, “Marriage is the legally recog-

nized union of one man and one woman.” That will be changed to read, “Marriage is the legally recognized union of two people,” clearly a broader definition that can include traditional marriage. The State will be magnanimous toward the Church. If this bill leaves you with a sense of mourning, do not mourn for the Church, but for Vermont. Remember the words of hymn writer Sabine Baring-Gould: **“Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane; But the Church of Jesus Constant will remain.”**

Mention has been made of rejoicing and mourning, but those are not our only options. Calling, e-mailing or writing our representatives and senators to encourage or discourage them on issues important to us is our privilege. Because it is our privilege, it is our duty.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” (*Psalms 9:17*)

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” (*1 Timothy 2:1-2*)

Lauston Stephens is a member of the Christian Action Ministry and attends Roadside Assembly of God



Certainly no legislation can be supposed more wholesome and necessary in the founding of a free, self-governing commonwealth...than that which seeks to establish it on the basis of the idea of the family, as consisting in and springing from the union for life of one man and one woman in the holy estate of matrimony; [Marriage is] the sure foundation of all that is stable and noble in our civilization; the best guarantee of that reverent morality which is the source of all beneficent progress in social and political improvement- US Supreme Court 1885

What can I do?



Faith without works is dead
James 2:17

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This issue highlights some of the pending legislation under consideration in the Vermont Statehouse that may impact you as a Christian.

We urge all citizens to be aware of what their representatives are doing in Montpelier and note that it is far easier to change the direction of legislation before it become law, than to alter bad legislation after it is passed into law.

Take the time to let your legislator know about your concerns. Most legislators hear very little or nothing from their constituents, and consider one letter or phone call as representing hundreds of people.

Make a difference!

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Next Meetings
March 12, 7:00 pm
St. Marks Catholic Church
Burlington, Vt.
March 9, 7:00 pm
Open Doors
Essex, Vt.

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