

# CAPITOL UPDATE

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## Conceal Carry Bill Headed for Override Attempt

Legislation to allow the concealed carry of weapons in Wisconsin is moving fast and could become law this session. On December 6, the Senate passed the proposal, formally known as Senate Bill 403, by



a 23-10 vote (22 votes are needed to override a veto) and sent it to the Assembly. Shortly thereafter, the Assembly amended the bill and passed it with just enough votes to override a veto. The Legislation now goes back to the Senate to vote on the Assembly's amended version. Assuming the Senate votes by the same margin to approve the bill, both houses will have passed it with veto-proof majorities. Thus, although Governor Doyle has promised to veto the bill, at least two Democrat supporters in the Senate and one in the Assembly will have to change their votes.

Throughout the process the original bill has been amended in several ways. One change of particular importance to the WJC is the addition of places of worship to the places where concealed carry will continue to be prohibited.

## Marriage Amendment Likely To Go To November Referendum

The constitutional amendment to ban same sex marriages and civil unions is currently on second consideration in the Legislature. In order to become part of Wisconsin's constitution, the proposal must pass the Legislature in two consecutive sessions and be approved by voters in a statewide referendum. Note that there is no involvement by the Governor.

The amendment successfully moved through the 2003-2004 Legislature and is now moving through the current session. If it passes both houses, it will be on the November 2006 ballot at the same time as the election for Governor, Attorney General and the federal mid-term elections.

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## Improved Mental Health Benefits Weakened by Amendment

The Wisconsin Jewish Conference is very concerned about inadequate coverage for mental health and alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) treatment in health insurance policies. WJC supports full parity of mental health/AODA benefits with benefits for other types of medical care. This session, we support Senate Bill 128, which provides a cost-of-living adjustment to the mandated minimum coverage limits provided in Wisconsin insurance law. SB 128 is not really a “parity” bill. However, it would increase minimum amounts of coverage that must be provided for the mental health/AODA treatment by the amount of the change in the consumer price index for medical services since the coverage amounts in current law were enacted (some of the limits are 20 years old!). Representative John Lehman (D-Racine) and Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) are the primary sponsors of SB 128.

In November, the Senate Committee on Health, Children, Families, Aging, and Long-Term Care held a public hearing on SB 128,

and the WJC provided testimony in support of the measure.

In December, the committee passed SB 128 by a unanimous 5-0 vote. While this is great news and increases the chance that the bill will be taken up on the Senate floor next year, the bill was amended by Senator Ron Brown (R-Eau Claire) to phase in the cost-of-living adjustment over 5 years. The amendment will make the bill more politically acceptable to legislators on the fence, but it puts consumers behind five years as they try to catch up to the cost of living adjustment. Senator Carol Roessler (R-Oshkosh) supported the amendment in the hope of building greater support for the bill when it goes to the full Senate for a vote. The Senate's next floorperiod is January 17-31. The vote on the amendment was along partisan lines with Senators Brown, Roessler and Darling (R-River Hills) voting yes, and Senators Erpenbach (D-Middleton) and Carpenter (D-Milwaukee) voting no.

## From United Jewish Communities: Congress Passes Terrorism Insurance Bill

Good news. The House and Senate passed the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act reauthorization bill (S. 467) in mid-December, which was quickly sent to the President for his signature. The underlying bill expires on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

The final bill, a product of tough House-Senate-Administration negotiations, is much narrower than the House-passed version UJC had hoped for. The House bill would have expanded the program to cover acts of domestic

terrorism and group life insurance, among other improvements. However, given the Administration's strong opposition to reauthorizing the bill and the Senate's similar misgivings (refusing to meet formally with the House in conference), the passage of S. 467 is a victory for the insurance and banking industries, as well as consumers. The underlying law is credited for stabilizing insurance markets that led to readily available and affordable coverage against international

## Governor Vetoes Bills of Interest to WJC



With Republicans controlling both houses of the Legislature and a Democrat in the Governor's office, we can expect that there will be vetoes occurring throughout the session. Governor Doyle has vetoed several measures, including the following bills that the WJC was monitoring:

**AB 207:** The so-called "conscience clause" bill would have allowed medical professionals to deny care to patients based on the medical professional's own ideological beliefs.

"One of the most sacred principles of our medical care system is that a doctor should always do what is in the best interests of a patient's health," Governor Doyle said. "But this bill would allow a doctor to put his or her political beliefs ahead of the patient's medical best interests. That is simply unconscionable. Medical decisions should be made by the patient and the doctor based on what's best for the patient, not on the doctor's political views."

**AB 499:** This bill would have criminalized some of the most promising scientific techniques used by stem cell researchers.

"While we can all agree that human cloning is not acceptable, it has already been prohibited by the federal Food and Drug Administration," Governor Doyle said. "The real purpose of this bill is to restrict stem cell research, which holds enormous potential for our state as well as the promise of curing juvenile diabetes, spinal cord injuries, and Parkinson's disease."

**AB 3:** The Governor vetoed this proposal to raise the enrollment cap for the Milwaukee Choice Program early in the session.

"I have said repeatedly that I am willing to support a proposal to lift the Choice cap as long as it also addresses the needs of the vast majority of Milwaukee children who attend public schools," Governor Doyle said. "But AB 3 helps a few students at the expense of many, and at the expense of property taxpayers."

Next year will see more vetoes. Governor Doyle has already promises to, once again, veto the proposal to allow the concealed carry of weapons.





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## Marriage Amendment

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As of the end of 2005, the amendment has passed the Senate on second consideration by a straight 19-14 party line vote. In the Assembly, the amendment has passed the committee level and is available for a floor vote. The amendment could be taken up on the floor as early as January 17, which is the first day of the next floorperiod.

## Terrorism Insurance

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terrorist attacks in a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> environment. The extension keeps the law essentially intact for two additional years, providing additional time for the industries to create a long-term market solution.

Had the measure failed, there was great concern that the risk would have shifted to the consumer in the form of significantly increased premiums and deductibles, as well as a narrowing or loss of coverage. In keeping with UJC's resolution on Homeland Security, the Washington Office engaged in advocacy at every step of the process to ensure that our concerns and those of the federations were heard. While the LIFT Act -- to ensure the adequacy and affordability of life insurance for Americans traveling abroad, including to Israel -- was excluded from the final measure, we expect to continue to advocate for its passage during the second session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Federations will have to check with their local carriers to gauge how the expected extension of the federal terrorism insurance program will impact them.

### THE WISCONSIN JEWISH CONFERENCE:

- *Serves as a clearinghouse to address important public policy issues*
- *Actively continues efforts to preserve the separation of church and state*
- *Works with local communities to respond to acts of discrimination and anti-Semitic incidents*
- *Monitors legislative activity and engage in coalition building*