Larry Hogan passionate about job creation, welcomes church input

By Maria Wiering

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ANNAPOLIS – Tax credits for nonpublic schools are in for gubernatorial candidate Larry Hogan, but state-mandated paid leave for employees is out.

"I'm more concerned about making sure people have a job," he said about the concept behind the Sick and Save Leave Act. "I don't want the government dictating to small business exactly what they have to do with their business."

Maryland's Catholic bishops backed the measure this year, but it was overshadowed and ultimately left behind by successful efforts to raise the minimum wage.

The Republican gubernatorial candidate offered a straightforward "yes" and "no" when questioned on those issues by members of the Maryland Catholic Conference's administrative board. Others – such as those related to the state's response to immigrants who have entered the country illegally – were complex, he said, and his administration's response to them would be, too.

As a Republican in "deep blue Maryland," he said he is committed to bipartisan solutions for the state's most pressing problems.

"My entire focus of the campaign is jobs, struggling families and restoring our economy," he said. "My focus is streamlining the government, providing tax relief and promoting policies that will create more opportunities, more jobs, more income for our citizens."

Nonpublic education

Hogan called himself "a strong supporter" of the implementation of a tax credit for businesses that donate to nonprofit organizations that assist lower-income students, and said he would include a measure to create it in his administration's first legislative package. Hogan also supports state funding for programs assisting nonpublic schools with textbook and technology costs, as well as aging infrastructure improvements.

Hogan said he would protect and try to boost the programs' funding, but has to first rein in the budget. The next gubernatorial administration faces a $400 million structural deficit.

Hogan said he also supports school choice and continuing the current pre-

kindergarten expansion program and Catholic schools' participation in it.

Family life and safety-net funding

Hogan said the answer to helping Maryland families facing poverty is job creation. "If we can turn our economy around, we can lift a lot of people out of poverty in many different ways," he said.

Anticipating that the next governor will face difficult decisions as he strives to balance the budget, the MCC asked how Hogan expects to fund safety-net programs for people in poverty. He said audits have identified nearly $2 billion in waste and fraud in the state government, and that by running the government more effectively, his administration would be able to direct more funding to programs for people in poverty.

"I think we have a moral imperative to help people most in need," he said, calling that "the government's primary responsibility."

Immigration

Responding to undocumented immigration is complex, Hogan said, because it involves state and federal policies, and a humanitarian response.

He said the federal government has failed to enact meaningful immigration reform, which has contributed to the crisis of unaccompanied immigrant minors flooding the U.S.-Mexico border. Baltimore's Catholic Charities has been helping some of these youths, and put a bid in for a federal contract to temporarily house them in Baltimore County.

Hogan acknowledged that he didn't have all the answers to the challenge. He wants to provide for people in need, he said, but also doesn't want to encourage people to break the laws. He supports clarifying the state's policies on arresting or detaining immigrants in the country illegally.

Employment

Hogan does not support requiring Maryland employers to provide sick and safe leave policies, adding, "I'm more concerned about making sure people have a job."

Job creation, however, is a key, and the government should invest more in skills training in high schools and community colleges, as well as reduce taxes to help businesses succeed and entice businesses to stay in the state, he said.

"The government needs to do everything it possibly can to help people provide for themselves and get a job," Hogan said.

Asked how his administration would address individuals facing employment barriers such as criminal records or lack of childcare, he said it was a complex issue and his administration would welcome the MCC's input.

Health care

Hogan called Maryland's roll-out of the federal Affordable Care Act "an unmitigated disaster" that needs to be rectified. He likes Virginia's approach to the ACA. It did

not launch its own exchanges, but directed people to the federal exchanges. He said the solution of providing health care for the uninsured is not simple. It requires state and federal cooperation.

Religious freedom

Hogan opposes state-level mandates to force faith-based groups to abandon their religious beliefs, he said. "The state should be doing more in conjunction with the church and other charitable organizations out there," he said. "Standing up for your (faith-based institutions) rights is something I'll be out front on."

Respect for life

Hogan is "personally opposed to abortion," but supports its legality in cases of rape, incest or if the mother's life is in jeopardy. He does not, however, expect to roll back current laws, he said.

Maryland is one of four states that do not report abortion statistics to the Centers for Disease Control, but the MCC supports collecting those statics. Hogan said he was not familiar with the issue and welcomed learning more about it.

Hogan supports the state's current ban on physician-assisted suicide.

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