Pennsylvania Catholic Conference
Interview with Tom Smith – Candidate for U.S. Senate
Monday, July 9, 2012

How will your personal religious beliefs influence your public leadership?

Well, my religious beliefs will definitely be there. That's how I've lived my life. I have never been a candidate for statewide office before so this is somewhat new to me. I will have to revert back to my instincts and my beliefs. That has always been where I go to figure out my problems, especially when I was in business. My religious background motivated my wife and me to adopt our children. Faith is very important to me. My grandfather was a pastor. I've been a Lutheran my whole life, I still go to the same Lutheran church in which I was baptized, confirmed and I'm pretty sure that is where the funeral will be, but hopefully not soon.

How should Pennsylvania address the needs of the poor, the elderly, people with disabilities? There is a lot of talk now about addressing the needs of the poor and how do you think Pennsylvania should do that?

Well, the need is there; I don't think anybody can dispute that. I am a firm believer that God put us here to help each other through our own actions and through the churches, things like that. If we did more of that, it would take a lot of pressure off the state of Pennsylvania. I am a firm believer that today, just as in bygone years, we must help people that truly need help, first in your family, your church, your friends, your community, and government last. We should be helping each other more than we do, in my opinion, but for those who truly need help and there is no one there to help them, the state is duty bound to help.

What is your view on expanding protection for unborn children?

I am pro-life. In fact, if I was honored to become the United States Senator of Pennsylvania, I would go along very quickly with an amendment to the Constitution of the United States affirming that life begins at conception. As I told you before, I am a very fortunate family man, I understand what life is. It should be protected at all costs.

Would you support either a federal tax credit program for businesses or individual families or some type of federal voucher program that would help students attend the school of their choice?

Number one, I am a firm believer that education is best handled at a local and state level. The more you can keep the federal government out of our lives, the better we are. I was fortunate to own five companies at the height of my business career. It was an honor to support private schooling through Pennsylvania's tax credit program. I am all for that. My wife was a school teacher for 38 years. Now she is retired. She was good at what she did. And my oldest daughter is a school teacher and head volleyball coach at a high school. But on a personal note, I can think of nothing more cruel than to see a young child, a young student who wants to learn but the opportunity isn't there. We have to work on that; we have to take care of those students.

I would rather see these questions addressed on a state level because, in my mind, it is each individual state's responsibility. On the state level you can go to Harrisburg and talk to somebody; in DC it is impossible to do that. But yes, tax credits for private schools and religious schools, absolutely.

The Catholic Church in the United States has been a supporter of access and coverage for health care for many, many years. In the Patient Protection and Affordability of Care Act that was just upheld by the Supreme Court, abortions in certain circumstances could be covered, also the law limited conscience protection and also limited coverage for immigrants. How would you take care of some of those issues that are really problematic?

I would vote to overturn Obamacare as it is commonly known. As a business owner, I was covering myself and 500 people with hospitalization insurance. But it would have been a challenge for me to buy that insurance for my employees if it was mandated that abortion be covered. I am pro-life and those kinds of things need to change. And from a practical standpoint, we should be very cautious about any piece of legislation from the federal government that is 2,700 pages long. We are still finding out what is in the bill. The bottom line is I would do everything I could as a United States Senator to see that the Church or any person was not mandated to support abortions with their insurance coverage. I don't think it is morally right.

I understand you have concerns about conscience protection. My answer to address that is similar to the one I stated before. I would like to see Obamacare repealed in its entirety. That would eliminate those concerns.

I will go one step further. There are ways to get more coverage for people; it's called the free enterprise system. Healthcare is a very important thing, but I do firmly believe the decisions on healthcare should be made between the patient and the doctor not bureaucrats in Washington.

What is your position on the death penalty, and why?

The death penalty is something that I take very, very seriously. It is not right to take a life; however, there are laws of man. If someone has been convicted of a mass murder or some heinous crime, I would support the death penalty in those rare instances. Ultimately, though, this decision should be left to the states.

What is your position the federal Defense of Marriage Act?

I will answer with what I believe. Marriage is between a man and a woman. Period. That law should stand.

There is always a push to introduce legislation that would make it unlawful for employers to discriminate based upon one's sexual orientation. What are your thoughts on that?

When I was an employer, I looked for the person best suited to do the job. It mattered not to me what gender they were or what religious beliefs they have. Sometimes we overregulate, but limited rules and regulations for that yes, I believe in that.

I don't see how you could force a religious institution to do that, you have got to live by your conscience and faith. I support being able go with your religious beliefs.

Illegal immigration, how would you address it?

I would start off by saying legal immigration built this country, but the word "illegal" means illegal. It is too bad that for every action there is a reaction. The immigration laws we have on the books were not enforced; now we have a bigger problem. If the voters want to change the

immigration laws, fine, that's a discussion that they should have in Congress. But illegal immigrants need to go back and apply for citizenship the correct way.

We can't just open our borders; there has to be some semblance of law. We have a real problem on our hands that we will have to deal with. And it could be that we do need to change immigration law. That is a discussion that needs to be had, and the sooner the better.

Is there anything else you would like to say about your candidacy to the Catholic public?
I have been blessed to have seven children, eight grandchildren, our ninth is due in October, and I am scared to death. I am very, very concerned about the direction of this country, where it is headed from a moral standpoint and from a fiscal standpoint. If we don't soon get this economic problem solved there is going to be a great need for your charity. We have to try to make things better.