

Pennsylvania Catholic Conference
Interview with U.S. Senate Candidate Pat Toomey- July 13, 2010

How do your personal religious beliefs influence your public leadership?

I was born and raised Catholic. I am a practicing Catholic. We are active members of our church. Our kids attend Catholic school, so my faith is a part of who I am. What I have learned through faith helps inform my judgment on many, many issues. It's hard to quantify, but my faith is an important source of informing my judgment.

How should Pennsylvania address the needs of the poor and taking it a step further, how should Pennsylvania meet the needs of the elderly?

With the caveat that I am running for a federal office rather than a state office, I will speak to federal legislation. First, the most important thing that we can do is have a very strong and robust economy. The greatest anti-poverty program ever created is a strong and growing economy that creates well-paying jobs. If we have strong economic growth and job creation, we create more opportunities. We have a rising standard of living. We have rising wages. So I think that is the single most important thing we can do. In addition, we need to have a safety net for people who are not able to fully participate in the economy, for whatever reason. A combination of strong economic growth, an appropriate safety net, and encouragement of charity in the private sector can be a very effective way to help the poor.

For the elderly, there are a number of important programs at the federal level. Social Security is a very important safety net; Medicare is another. We must keep those programs strong. Unfortunately, they are not presently on sound financial footing. We need to make the kind of reforms that will allow them to be sustainable because they are not sustainable in their current design.

I published a book last year called "The Road to Prosperity." It is about how we can achieve greater economic prosperity and create opportunities for more people. I devote a chapter in that book to how we should reform Social Security. For anybody who is already retired, or close to retirement age, I don't think that there should be any changes at all. Those folks need to be certain that the plan that they were promised is going to be there exactly as they anticipated. But, given that otherwise it is not sustainable, we ought to offer alternatives for younger people. A very constructive development would give younger workers an opportunity to accumulate savings. Most workers live paycheck to paycheck. They don't really accumulate savings and frankly, Social Security is making promises to young people that it is not going to be able to keep. So I would like to give these workers an opportunity to accumulate savings that they would own and control. It would have to be regulated and properly diversified, but over time, the accumulated earnings on those savings could provide a very generous retirement benefit. If an unfortunate incident occurs and somebody dies before they are able to really enjoy their retirement, they would at least be able to pass the nest egg on to their kids. Social Security completely lacks this feature today. These are some of the reforms that would make the program financially viable for taxpayers and for our government.

Your view on expanding protection for unborn children?

This is important to me. I am pro-life and I hope that we are moving toward restoring a culture that celebrates life; but we have a long way to go. I will be one of the voices in the Senate that defends innocent life, including the life of the unborn.

Unfortunately, the new health care law is going to introduce taxpayer-subsidized insurance for abortion for the first time. That is very bad policy. We ought to revisit that bill and remove the taxpayer funding of abortion, among other changes.

Would you support a federal tax credit for businesses or individual families that would allow students to attend schools of their choice?

I am a big supporter of school choice. We do a great disservice to kids, especially the poorest kids in our society, who are trapped in a school where they have no choice. I have long held the view that nobody cares as much about a child as his or her parents. Parents will make good choices if they have choices to make. Another chapter in my book is dedicated to school choice. I feel very strongly about it. This reform would have a profound effect, especially on families in inner cities. Children are just not getting the best opportunities in life because they never get the necessary education. I am a believer that the money we spend on education should follow the child to the school their parents select. It could be public or private, religious or non-religious; it could be for-profit, or not-for-profit. A vigorous, competitive marketplace in education would give parents more choices and better outcomes. In the end, that means more opportunities for children.

You already talked about abortion coverage in the health care statute, but two other areas we are concerned about include insufficient conscience protection and coverage of immigrants. Could you speak to those two? How you would help to remediate those?

To force health care providers to provide services that run contrary to their deeply held convictions is extremely problematic. I have always supported those conscience protections within health care. That should still be the case. Our current legislation addresses in some ways how health care can be available to immigrants in the sense that anybody who shows up in an emergency room needs to be treated. I support that. If someone shows up in significant need of health care as a humane and decent society we want to provide that. The kinds of reforms that I have advocated regarding health care would be good for everybody, but would be very different from this legislation. Specifically I would like to see us lower costs and improve access, but retain flexibility and move toward personal ownership of health insurance and therefore health care. Whereas what we have here is legislation that moves us more toward government ownership and government control, which worries me at a lot of levels. Some specific things I have long advocated are giving individuals the same tax deduction that employers get when they buy health insurance and requiring insurance companies to compete more for our business than they do now. We essentially allow the creation of a cartel for insurance and then we wonder why the service is not as good as we expect. We protect those companies from competition, so we shouldn't be surprised. Thirdly, I do think we need medical malpractice liability reform. We tolerate a level of litigation that is expensive and counterproductive. Addressing these things would improve affordability and accessibility. We can do it without being terribly disruptive to people who are currently satisfied with their plans, without being devastating to our budget and without impeding economic growth.

What is your position on the death penalty and why?

I support the death penalty. The cases in which I think it is appropriate are rare; but I do think there are some crimes that are so heinous that we have to respond with that penalty.

Your position on the federal Defense of Marriage Act.

I support the Defense of Marriage Act and I think it should remain.

Your position on the Employment Nondiscrimination Act or ENDA, which would make it unlawful for employers to discriminate based upon sexual orientation.

I would like to look at that one more closely. I get worried when the government starts imposing these things on private employers. My first reaction is one of concern, but I would like to check into that.

Question of illegal immigration – how would you address it?

We need to recognize that we are a very wealthy, very prosperous country relative to our neighbors in the south, despite the difficult economic circumstances we are in now. That is the reality. There is a big disparity. Given that disparity there is going to be a tremendous number of people from these very poor regions coming to our country. The question is what do we do about that? I don't think it makes sense for us to have no control over our border and to allow unlimited and lawless movement into our country. We ought to take control of the border and then develop a legal immigration process that would create a guest worker program for those who want to come here temporarily, as well as a citizenship track for those who want to come here permanently. But the problem is here now because the federal government has not exercised control of the border. If people had confidence that we could actually control this process, then we could accommodate significant numbers of people who want to come to this country and be productive contributors, just as millions of immigrants have done for many generations in our country. I am the grandson of immigrants; all of us have an immigrant story. I am a believer that immigrants can make a big contribution to this country, but immigration ought to be done in a legal and controlled fashion.

Is there anything you would like to say to the Catholic public in Pennsylvania?

My message for a Catholic audience is very similar to my general message. The Catholic population is a big segment of Pennsylvania. When I talk to our fellow parishioners at our kids' soccer games or at a Church function it is about the same things that people of all faiths are worried about: the future of our country, whether we are going to have a strong economy, whether our kids are going to have the same kinds of opportunities that we've had. I think the federal government is on a path that is jeopardizing those opportunities. The level of spending is completely unsustainable and the deficits are very worrisome. We have a government that is trying to expand its power, scope, and control of the economy in ways that are very counterproductive to economic growth. I started this conversation about how important it is to have strong economic growth. As a guy who grew up in a blue-collar family, has been in small business and created jobs, I really believe that I understand what it takes to turn this around. We must encourage entrepreneurs to take risks, to launch new businesses, and to expand existing businesses so we create the kind of jobs that generate prosperity. Therefore, we can ensure the future for our kids that we want them to have. There has never been a generation of Americans who passed on to their kids a diminished country, one in which they have had fewer opportunities than their parents had. I don't want us to be the first. That would be unacceptable.