

Choice plan fails test; final grade undecided

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — California voters turned down a school-choice initiative in recent elections, but plan supporters believe the final grade is a long way off.

School-choice proponents, say parents need money to educate their children where they think best. Now that the battle cry has been raised against public schools, they say, further solutions for reform are inevitable.

But the public hasn't decided what kind of education reform it wants. Although exit polls on Election Day revealed overall support for change in the country's educational system, California voters rejected the voucher initiative, Proposition 174, by a 2 to 1 margin. Surveys indicate that 70 percent of Americans support school choice, but voters in Oregon in 1991 and Colorado in 1992 both rejected school-choice initiatives.

Peter Wehner, director of policy for Empower America, a group that backed Proposition 174, concentrates on polls more than ballots. "At first there was low public support (for school choice) and today there is widespread support," he told Catholic News Service.

School-choice advocates in California proposed vouchers as a way of creating a competitive environment that would

force public schools to improve.

Opponents, including the National Education Association — which contributed \$1 million to the \$14-million anti-voucher effort in California — say vouchers would rob public schools of needed resources and good students.

In the coming year the school-choice debate will continue in several state legislatures across the nation — including New York.

In both Ohio and Arizona, pilot voucher programs are being prepared for presentation to their state legislatures. In Oregon, signatures are being collected again to put a voucher program on next year's ballot.

Legislation will be introduced in New York to provide vouchers to families on a three-year, phased-in basis, and Pennsylvania's General Assembly is considering comprehensive choice proposals.

Most of these measures would allow parents to choose only from among public schools.

In Wisconsin, however, a three-year-old voucher system includes private schools and provides \$2,500 in state funds for up to 1,000 poor children to attend non-sectarian private schools. In September, Puerto Rico enacted a voucher law that is currently being challenged in court because it includes religious schools.

U.S. bishops face varied agenda for fall meeting in Washington

WASHINGTON (CNS) — When the U.S. Catholic bishops hold their 46th general meeting in Washington Nov. 15-18, they will be asked to:

- Approve a new statement on war and peace issues today, 10 years after their landmark pastoral letter on nuclear war and weaponry.
- Make a statement on the social mission of the parish.
- Deliver a pastoral message in support of family life and values.
- Issue a statement marking the 25th anniversary of the revival of the permanent diaconate.
- Approve the first section of a revised translation of the Sacramentary, the first of seven parts to be presented to the bishops for action over the next two years.
- Set rules for the process of amendment, debate and vote on future sections of the Sacramentary.
- Approve an inclusive-language version of the Grail Psalter for liturgical use.
- Approve the Spanish translation of the Rite of Christian Funerals.
- Decide on a proposed fifth year of parish collections in 1995 to aid the

church in Eastern and Central Europe.

- Approve an overall 1994 budget of \$41.7 million for the offices and agencies of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.
- Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Catholic Relief Services with a Mass and dinner.
- Give the Committee for Pro-Life Affairs a go-ahead to draft a new NCCB statement on abortion in support of an anticipated 1994 papal encyclical on moral questions surrounding life and death.
- Approve new rules for future funding and reporting procedures for the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America.
- Hear reports on a variety of topics including sexual abuse of children, the retirement fund for religious, World Youth Day and The Catholic University of America.

Supporter posts bail for fasting Kevorkian

DETROIT (CNS) — Controversial suicide doctor Jack Kevorkian was released from jail Nov. 8 after he was bailed out by a man worried that the retired pathologist would starve himself to death.

Kevorkian, 65, had been on a hunger strike since Nov. 5 after a Detroit judge ordered him held on a \$20,000 bond for violating the state's new assisted suicide law.

Kevorkian, who has helped 19 people commit suicide since 1990, was released after an attorney named Jack DeMoss posted the \$2,000 cash requirement, said Nancy Mouradian, chief of staff at the jail.



Mourning the loss

Elaine Lund (right) is hugged by a friend while praying before a statue of the Madonna at a Laguna Beach, Calif., church Oct. 31. Lund lost her home in one of several fire storms that have stricken Southern California.

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