

Health Care for Life and for All, By Bishop William F. Murphy, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo and Bishop John Wester
and
The Cost is too High; the Loss is too Great
Statement by Cardinal Francis George, OMI

Health Care for Life and for All

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For decades, the United States Catholic bishops have actively supported universal health care. The Catholic Church teaches that health care is a basic human right, essential for human life and dignity. Our community of faith provides health care to millions, purchases health care for tens of thousands and addresses the failings of our health care system in our parishes, emergency rooms and shelters. This is why we as bishops continue to insist that health care reform which truly protects the life, dignity, consciences and health of all is a moral imperative and urgent national priority.

We are convinced that the Senate legislation presented to the House of Representatives on a “take it or leave it” basis sadly fails this test and ought to be opposed in its current form. Why do we take this position, when we have a long record of support for health care reform? This judgment is based on a set of moral principles and legislative criteria that can be found on our website: www.usccb.org/healthcare. But more simply, our essential priorities can be summarized in two sentences:

1. Health care reform must protect life and conscience, not threaten them. The Senate bill extends abortion coverage, allows federal funds to pay for elective abortions and denies adequate conscience protection to individuals and institutions. Needed health care reform must keep in place the longstanding and widely supported federal policy that neither elective abortion nor plans which include elective abortion can be paid for with federal funds. Simply put, health care reform ought to continue to apply both parts of the Hyde amendment, no more and no less. The House adopted this policy by a large bipartisan majority, establishing the same protections that govern Medicaid, SCHIP, the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program and other federal health programs. Despite claims to the contrary, the status quo prohibits the federal government from funding or facilitating plans that include elective abortion. The Senate bill violates this prohibition by providing subsidies to purchase such plans. The House bill provides that no one has to pay for other people’s abortions, while the Senate bill does not. While the Senate provides for one plan without abortion coverage in each exchange, those who select another plan in an exchange to better meet the special needs of their family will be required to pay a separate monthly fee into a fund exclusively for abortions. This new federal requirement is an attempt to circumvent the Hyde amendment. It is a far more direct imposition on the consciences of those who do not wish to pay for the destruction of unborn human life than anything currently in federal law.

It is not those who require that the Hyde Amendment be fully applied who are obstructing reform, since this is the law of the land and the will of the American people. Rather, those who would expand federal participation in abortion, require people to pay for other people’s abortions, and refuse to incorporate essential conscience protections (both within and

beyond the abortion context) are threatening genuine reform. With conscience protection as with abortion funding, the goal is to preserve the status quo.

2. Universal coverage should be truly universal. People should never be denied coverage because they can't afford it, because of where they live or work, or because of where they come from and when they got here. The Senate bill would not only continue current law that denies legal immigrants access to Medicaid for five years, but also prohibit undocumented immigrants from buying insurance for their families in the exchanges using their own money. These provisions could leave immigrants and their families worse off, and at the same time it would also hurt the public health of our nation by making hospital emergency rooms the doctors' offices of the uninsured.

Now, after a year of divisive political combat, members of the House are told that they can advance health care reform only by adopting the Senate legislation as is, including these fundamental flaws. The House Democratic leadership is ignoring the pleas of pro-life and Hispanic members of their caucus. Apparently they will not even try to address the serious problems on abortion funding, conscience protection and fair treatment of immigrants. On the other hand, Republicans pledge to do all they can to defeat the legislation by threatening to object to any improvements in the Senate bill, further complicating the process. The White House, admirably concerned for the many millions without insurance and for those who cannot purchase it, seems willing to accept even a bill which leaves immigrants worse off and undermines the President's pledge to retain existing protections on abortion funding and freedom of conscience.

We are bishops, not politicians, policy experts or legislative tacticians. We are also pastors, teachers, and citizens. At this point of decision, we cannot compromise on basic moral principles. We can only urge -- and hope and pray -- that the House of Representatives will find the will and the means to adopt health care reform that protects the life, dignity, conscience and health of all. The legislation the House adopted, while not perfect, came closer to meeting these criteria. The Senate legislation simply does not meet them. This is why we are compelled to urge members of the House to oppose the Senate bill unless and until these fundamental flaws are remedied. Then it would be possible for Congress to advance health care reform that reflects a true commitment to life and dignity for all.

We urge our people to let their representatives know that we want Hyde Amendment protections for the unborn, conscience protections for individuals and institutions and openness to the legitimate claims of immigrants.

Bishop William F. Murphy is bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York and chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston is chair of the USCCB Committee on Pro-life Activities. Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City is chair of the USCCB Committee on Migration.

DATE: March 15, 2010

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**PRESIDENT OF U.S. BISHOPS SAYS COST IS TOO HIGH, LOSS IS TOO GREAT
FOR HEALTH CARE BILL NOT TO BE REVISED**

WASHINGTON—Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued the following statement on the state of health care reform:

Statement by Cardinal Francis George, OMI

The Cost is too High; the Loss is too Great

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have long and consistently advocated for the reform of the American health care system. Their experience in health care and in Catholic parishes has acquainted them with the anguish of mothers who are unable to afford prenatal care, of families unable to ensure quality care for their children, and of those who cannot obtain insurance because of preexisting conditions.

Throughout the discussion on health care over the last year, the bishops have advocated a bipartisan approach to solving our national health care needs. They have urged that all who are sick, injured or in need receive necessary and appropriate medical assistance, and that no one be deliberately killed through an expansion of federal funding of abortion itself or of insurance plans that cover abortion. These are the provisions of the long standing Hyde amendment, passed annually in every federal bill appropriating funds for health care; and surveys show that this legislation reflects the will of the majority of our fellow citizens. The American people and the Catholic bishops have been promised that, in any final bill, no federal funds would be used for abortion and that the legal status quo would be respected.

However, the bishops were left disappointed and puzzled to learn that the basis for any vote on health care will be the Senate bill passed on Christmas Eve. Notwithstanding the denials and explanations of its supporters, and unlike the bill approved by the House of Representatives in November, the Senate bill deliberately excludes the language of the Hyde amendment. It expands federal funding and the role of the federal government in the provision of abortion procedures. In so doing, it forces all of us to become involved in an act that profoundly violates the conscience of many, the deliberate destruction of unwanted members of the human family still waiting to be born.

What do the bishops find so deeply disturbing about the Senate bill? The points at issue can be summarized briefly. The status quo in federal abortion policy, as reflected in the Hyde Amendment, excludes abortion from all health insurance plans receiving federal subsidies. In the Senate bill, there is the provision that only one of the proposed multi-state plans will **not** cover elective abortions – all other plans (including other multi-state plans) can do so, and receive federal tax credits. This means that individuals or families in complex medical circumstances will likely be forced to choose and contribute to an insurance plan that funds abortions in order to meet their particular health needs.

Further, the Senate bill authorizes and appropriates billions of dollars in new funding outside the scope of the appropriations bills covered by the Hyde amendment and similar provisions. As the bill is written, the new funds it appropriates over the next five years, for Community Health Centers for example (Sec. 10503), will be available by statute for elective abortions, even though the present regulations do conform to the Hyde amendment. Regulations, however, can be changed at will, unless they are governed by statute.

Additionally, no provision in the Senate bill incorporates the longstanding and widely supported protection for conscience regarding abortion as found in the Hyde/Weldon amendment. Moreover, neither the House nor Senate bill contains meaningful conscience protection outside the abortion context. Any final bill, to be fair to all, must retain the accommodation of the full range of religious and moral objections in the provision of health insurance and services that are contained in current law, for both individuals and institutions.

This analysis of the flaws in the legislation is not completely shared by the leaders of the Catholic Health Association. They believe, moreover, that the defects that they do recognize can be corrected after the passage of the final bill. The bishops, however, judge that the flaws are so fundamental that they vitiate the good that the bill intends to promote. Assurances that the moral objections to the legislation can be met only after the bill is passed seem a little like asking us, in Midwestern parlance, to buy a pig in a poke.

What is tragic about this turn of events is that it needn't have happened. The status quo that has served our national consensus and respected the consciences of all with regard to abortion is the Hyde amendment. The House courageously included an amendment applying the Hyde policy to its Health Care bill passed in November. Its absence in the Senate bill and the resulting impasse are not an accident. Those in the Senate who wanted to purge the Hyde amendment from this national legislation are obstructing the reform of health care.

This is not quibbling over technicalities. The deliberate omission in the Senate Bill of the necessary language that could have taken this moral question off the table and out of play leaves us still looking for a way to meet the President's and our concern to provide health care for those millions whose primary care physician is now an emergency room doctor. As Pope Benedict told Ambassador to the Holy See Miguel H. Diaz when he presented his credentials as the United States government's representative to the Holy See, there is "an indissoluble bond between an ethic of life and every other aspect of social ethics."

Two basic principles, therefore, continue to shape the concerns of the Catholic bishops: health care means taking care of the health needs of all, across the human life span; and the expansion of health care should not involve the expansion of abortion funding and of policies forcing everyone to pay for abortions. Because these principles have not been respected, despite the good that the bill under consideration intends or might achieve, the Catholic bishops regretfully hold that it must be opposed unless and until these serious moral problems are addressed.

Keywords: USCCB, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, President, Cardinal Francis George, health care reform, Senate bill, abortion funding, Hyde Amendment, Stupak Amendment

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