

USCCB Nationwide Bulletin Insert

Pulpit Announcements & Prayer Petition

Instructions: As introduced by a cover letter to all bishops from the President of the Conference and the Chairmen of the 3 major USCCB committees engaged in health care reform, the US bishops have asked that the USCCB Nationwide Bulletin Insert on health care reform be printed or hand-stuffed in every parish bulletin and/or distributed in pews or at church entrances as soon as possible.

Congressional votes may take place as soon as early November. Please encourage parishioners to pray for this effort as well. More information can be found at www.usccb.org/healthcare.

To be announced at all Masses on the weekend when the Bulletin Insert is distributed:

Congress is preparing to debate health care reform legislation. The Catholic bishops of the United States strongly support genuine health care reform that protects the life and dignity of all, from the moment of conception until natural death. However, all current bills are seriously deficient on abortion and conscience rights, and do not yet provide adequate access to health care for immigrants and the poor.

In your pews/bulletins today, you'll find a special flier/bulletin insert from the US Bishops Conference asking you to please contact your Representative and Senators immediately and urge them to fix these bills with pro-life amendments. The flier/bulletin insert includes a web address that allows you to send an email message to Congress with a click of a button. The bishops have asked for our swift action and the commitment of our prayers for this critical effort. Thank you for your help. We can help make sure that health care reform will be about saving lives, not destroying them.

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Suggested Prayer of the Faithful:

That Congress will act to ensure that needed health care reform will truly protect the life, dignity and health care of all and that we will raise our voices to protect the unborn and the most vulnerable and to preserve our freedom of conscience. We pray to the Lord.

Talking points (from the USCCB0

- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' has a long record of active support for health care reform and can be a valuable ally in this important task.
- As the Representative/Senator knows, the Church in St. Petersburg and across the nation is deeply involved in every aspect of health care. We provide health care to millions. We purchase health care for tens of thousands of our employees. We pick up the pieces of a failing health care system in our emergency rooms, shelters and parishes. And we teach about health care as a basic human right, integral to our defense of human life. We know the need for reform.
- However, the Bishops are first moral teachers and we have insisted from the beginning that health care reform must protect the life, dignity, and health of all. We cannot support a bill that conflicts with our deeply held moral commitment to the protection of all life, from conception to natural death. We look to the House/Senate to carry out the President's public commitments on abortion funding and conscience protection. Despite some claims to the contrary, the current bills fail to do this, especially in the area of mandated funding for abortion.

Abortion

- It is essential that the legislation clearly include existing prohibitions on abortion funding and mandates and existing conscience protections.
- The Hyde amendment and similar provisions govern every federal health care program (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, Children's Health Care (SCHIP), the Federal Health Employee Health Benefits program, military and Native American health programs). These laws, which prevent federal funding of elective abortion **and** of health plans that cover such abortions, have been in place for decades and are widely supported. (See polling data).
- We welcomed the President's public commitment to exclude federal funding of abortion from his health care plan, and we want to help Congress carry it out. However, no current bill in House or Senate fully reflects this status quo or includes a provision like the Hyde amendment.
- Some have said the "Capps Amendment," now part of one House and one Senate bill, is a solution to these problems. However, it allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to mandate federally funded abortions throughout any public option (government-sponsored health plan) offered nationwide. The government will fund private plans that cover elective abortion, and mandate that each purchaser pay an "abortion surcharge" to pay directly for elective abortions in these plans. For the first time, the federal government will require pro-life Americans to pay directly for other people's abortions. This is not the status quo and actually makes things worse. I want to share with you and your staff our analysis that explains this complicated reality as clearly as we can. (see "Abortion and Conscience Problems in Health Care Reform Bills (Or: What's Wrong with the Capps Amendment?)", www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/healthcare/capps_102309.pdf).
- Our goals are limited and restrained. We do not see health care reform as a means for advancing an anti-abortion agenda. Rather, we insist that reform not become a vehicle for government required payments for abortion or abortion mandates. All we seek is that current law be clearly reflected in reform. Otherwise, you will turn us from allies into adversaries. We cannot stand by while long standing protections are swept away and replaced by unprecedented government involvement in the destruction of innocent human life.

- In respect for the status quo, we recognize the sad reality that abortion is legal, available and people can voluntarily purchase insurance that includes it. A provision that reflects current policies against government funding of elective abortion coverage would not change this reality:
 - The mandatory surcharge for abortion could become voluntary and separate, and offered by insurers as optional coverage which people can purchase if they choose to do so. (One would think this should have a certain appeal for those who support “choice” in this matter).
 - Insurers would be free to offer two plans which are identical except for coverage of abortion, offering only the plan without elective abortions to those who purchase coverage with federal subsidies.
 - Note that if this program were to reflect the status quo of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, widely regarded as a model, it would not make any provision for elective abortion coverage. For many years a provision similar to the Hyde amendment has governed this plan for millions of federal employees, including members of the House and Senate and their families.
- We make the moral case for health care reform without abortion funding and mandates, but you know the political case. Health care reform will be hard enough to pass without requiring people to pay for other people’s abortions or to accept abortion coverage most Americans don’t want. I urge you to apply existing law clearly and effectively and get this issue off the table.

Conscience Protections

- On conscience rights, we especially need your help. This should not be a divisive matter. The President committed to preserving current conscience laws in this legislation, and Senator Kennedy pledged his support for these laws in his final letter to the Holy Father. Some current bills include some protections in the area of abortion, but all are still far from reflecting current law. For example, no bill incorporates the law that since 1973 has protected health care providers in other federal health programs from being forced to provide abortions and sterilizations against their moral and religious convictions (“Church amendment”); and no bill exempts religiously affiliated plans from a federal mandate for providing contraceptive coverage, as the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program does. Can we count on your help in addressing this?

Immigrants and Affordability

- We are very concerned that immigrants, especially legal immigrants, would be left worse off as a result of unwise and punitive provisions that could end up in health reform. We seek your help to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children and all of society.
- We seek to maintain an adequate safety net for those who remain uncovered and to eliminate the five-year waiting period banning immigrants lawfully residing in the United States from enrolling in Medicaid. We also need your leadership in resisting efforts to impose barriers (e.g., waiting period to obtain subsidies) on immigrants seeking to obtain private health care coverage.
- On affordability, we are very concerned that the Senate bill will require families of modest means to spend more money than they can afford for health care coverage. In efforts to hold down the cost of the bills, essential subsidies for working families have been cut back. These need to be strengthened.

Conclusion

- The Catholic Bishops have long supported health care coverage for all and do not want to have to oppose legislation which emerges in Congress and is supported by the Administration, but we will have no choice but to do so if our essential moral criteria are not met.

- We are specifically asking you to help remedy this fundamental problem threatening health care reform.
- [*For members of the House of Representatives*] We strongly urge House members to vote for the Stupak amendment, to clearly incorporate existing policies on abortion funding and mandates and on conscience protections. In the House it may be necessary to vote against a “closed rule” that would block consideration of this essential amendment.
- [*For Senators*] We strongly urge you to support amendment(s) to clearly incorporate existing policies on abortion funding and mandates and on conscience protections into the Senate Legislation, to insure that no one is required to pay for or participate in abortion.
- We believe this commitment will help pass legislation, and a refusal to do so will turn potential allies into reluctant adversaries. We also urge you to help ensure that effective conscience protection is maintained.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and our staff are eager to work with you and others to resolve these fundamental issues and to help bring about genuine health care reform which protects the life and dignity of all. Can we count on your support of these essential steps? How can we work together to accomplish our mutual goals?