



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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December 7, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we strongly urge the Senate to adopt essential changes to the health care reform bill to ensure that needed health care reform legislation truly protects the life, dignity, consciences and health of all.

Therefore we urgently ask you to **support an essential amendment to be offered by Senators Ben Nelson (D-NE), Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Robert Casey (D-PA)** to keep in place the longstanding and widely supported federal policy against government funding of health coverage that includes elective abortions.

Sadly, the current Senate bill fails to keep in place the longstanding federal policy against the use of federal funds for elective abortions or health plans that include elective abortions -- a policy upheld in all health programs covered by the Hyde Amendment, the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program -- and now in the House-passed "Affordable Health Care for America Act." We believe legislation that violates this moral principle is not true health care reform and must be amended to reflect the Hyde restrictions. If that fails, the current legislation should be opposed.

This amendment will have the same effect as the Stupak-Pitts-Ellsworth-Kaptur-Dahlkemper-Lipinski-Smith Amendment already accepted in the House by an overwhelming bipartisan majority (see attached fact sheet). Like that amendment, it does not change the current situation in our country: Abortion is legal and available, but no federal dollars can be used to pay for elective abortions **or** plans that include elective abortions. This amendment does not restrict abortion, or prevent people from buying insurance covering abortion with their own funds. It simply ensures that where federal funds are involved, people are not required to pay for other people's abortions.


The bill currently before the Senate allows the HHS Secretary to mandate abortion coverage throughout the government-run "community health insurance option." It also provides funding for other plans that cover unlimited abortions, and creates an unprecedented mandatory "abortion surcharge" in such plans that will require pro-life purchasers to pay directly and explicitly for other people's abortions. The bill does not maintain essential nondiscrimination protections for providers who decline involvement in abortion. The Nelson-Hatch-Casey amendment simply corrects these grave departures from current federal policy.

We urge the Senate to support the Nelson-Hatch-Casey amendment. As other amendments are offered to the bill that address our priorities on conscience protection, affordability and fair treatment of immigrants, we will continue to communicate our positions on these issues to the Senate.

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The Catholic bishops have long supported adequate and affordable health care for all. As pastors and teachers, we believe genuine health care reform must protect human life and dignity, not threaten them, especially for the most voiceless and vulnerable. We believe health care legislation must respect the consciences of providers, taxpayers, and others, not violate them. We believe universal coverage should be truly universal, not deny health care to those in need because of their condition, age, where they come from or when they arrive here. Providing affordable and accessible health care that clearly reflects these fundamental principles is a public good, moral imperative and urgent national priority.

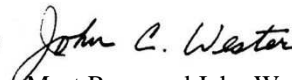
Sincerely,



Most Reverend William F. Murphy
Bishop of Rockville Centre
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston-Houston
Chairman
Committee on Pro-life Activities



Most Reverend John Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City
Chairman
Committee on Migration