



## Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194

202-541-3070 • FAX 202-541-3054 • EMAIL [PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG](mailto:PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG) • WEB [WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE](http://WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE)

February 5, 2009

Dear Representative:

On January 13 the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Francis George, wrote to all members of Congress about the bishops' overall policy agenda. In this, my first letter to the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress as Chairman of the bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, I want to reaffirm Cardinal George's statement that we will "seek ways to work constructively with the new Administration and Congress and others of good will" to advance justice, peace and the dignity of all human life.

One of Congress's first orders of business will be to approve appropriations bills to keep federal programs funded through September 2009, as the current legislation will expire in early March. I urge you *not* to use this legislation to weaken or rescind longstanding provisions that protect U.S. taxpayers from being forced to fund and promote the destruction of innocent human life.

In making this plea, I am joined by millions of Catholics and others who, in the weeks to come, will be sending postcards to their elected representatives with this message: "*Please oppose FOCA [the 'Freedom of Choice Act'] or any similar measure, and retain laws against federal funding and promotion of abortion.*" While an extreme proposal like FOCA would overturn hundreds of pro-life laws at once, we are equally concerned that such laws may be overturned one at a time during Congress's appropriations process.

A number of these laws have been in effect for many years, regardless of which party controlled Congress or the White House. For example, the Hyde amendment preventing taxpayer funding of abortion in most federal health programs was first enacted in 1976. Lawmakers who disagree about the legal status of abortion have long agreed that Americans should not be forced by government to support or participate in abortion against their will. Efforts to coerce consciences in this way violate any possible definition of "pro-choice," and undermine our nation's long tradition of respect for conscience and religious freedom.

At a time when more Americans than ever may require life-affirming assistance from the government for their basic needs, efforts to force Americans to subsidize the denial and destruction of life would be especially tragic. Such efforts would radically divide our nation and increase distrust of Congress among millions of Americans, at a time when we need to unite in solidarity to serve the urgent needs of all.

Longstanding pro-life provisions in the current appropriations bills which should be retained without weakening changes include the following.

The **Hyde amendment** to the Labor/HHS appropriations bill, and parallel provisions in other appropriations bills (regarding military hospitals, the District of Columbia, federal employees' health benefits, foreign assistance, and so on) protect taxpayers from being compelled to subsidize and promote abortion in domestic and international programs. These provisions are known to be

effective in reducing abortions, a goal that enjoys broad bipartisan consensus. According to the Guttmacher Institute, research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, the abortion rate for Medicaid-eligible women *doubles* if government subsidizes Medicaid abortions. It is a matter of grave concern that the pending Senate draft of the Financial Services appropriations bill has omitted the Hyde language from its section on federal employees' health benefits.

Since 1996, the **Dickey/Wicker amendment** to the Labor/HHS appropriations bill has prevented federal funding for research in which human embryos are created, harmed and destroyed. Even policy makers who support funding for embryonic stem cell research have agreed not to force taxpayers to subsidize the actual destruction of embryonic human life for this or any other research.

The **Hyde/Weldon conscience protection amendment** since 2004 has prevented federal agencies, and state and local governments receiving federal funds, from discriminating against individual or institutional health care providers who do not participate in abortion. Such respect for freedom of conscience should be a matter of strong agreement between lawmakers who want to protect unborn human life, and those who say this is a matter best left to "freedom of choice." Clearly "choice" is an empty slogan if physicians, nurses and hospitals must "choose" to provide abortions or be forced out of the health care field. Like Congress's decision about requiring taxpayers to fund abortion, the decision whether to maintain current conscience protections could play a major role in determining whether Americans of different backgrounds, viewpoints and religions will be able to work together toward a consensus on much-needed health care reform.

Beginning in 1985, the **Kemp-Kasten amendment** to the State/Foreign Operations appropriations bill has prevented U.S. funding of organizations that support or help manage programs of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization. This is another issue on which everyone should agree. Coercive abortion was prosecuted as a crime against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, and condemned as violence against women by member nations at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The claim that organizations involved in such atrocities in places like the People's Republic of China nonetheless have good programs in other places is unpersuasive. Many organizations run good programs without violating fundamental human rights.

These and similar laws have been in effect for many years, no matter which party controlled Congress or the White House, because they are modest, common-sense policies that are widely supported even among people who disagree on the legal status of abortion. In a society that often seems torn between the values of "choice" and "life," it is easy to agree that we should honor the consciences of pregnant women and health care professionals who want to choose life. In a society that wants to reduce abortions, it makes no sense for government to force its citizens to fund and promote abortion. As you complete the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2009, I strongly urge you to retain these essential provisions in law.

Sincerely,



Cardinal Justin Rigali  
Archbishop of Philadelphia  
Chairman, Committee for Pro-Life Activities  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops