

New health care reform law contributes to the march toward a culture of death

Statement regarding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

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For decades, the Catholic Bishops of the United States have faithfully called for greater access to health care, especially for the poor and uninsured. However, the new law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, while seeking to expand this access, at the same time embraces language which allows for the violation of the sacredness of human life by the expansion of federal funding of abortion. Furthermore, there is no clear support for conscience protection in the law. These problems are not mere shortcomings or imperfections, but grave and serious matters. Thus, the votes on health care reform taken by both chambers of Congress and signed into law by the president have ignored the basic principles for a just society and contributed to the precipitous march of society towards a culture of death.

In the final analysis, even in light of attempted remedies through executive orders and follow-up fix-it bills, this new national health care law still allows federal funds from taxes to pay for elective abortions through community health centers and federal health plans.

The executive order, which some legislators used as reasoning for their “yes” votes on the legislation, falls short. The legal and policy advisors of the U.S. Catholic Bishops have noted, the executive order cannot and does not fix the statutory problems of funding abortion, it cannot and does not make up for the absence of conscience protections that are missing from the statute, and it does not strengthen existing conscience protections. Where the executive order purports to fix shortcomings in these areas, it is highly likely to be legally invalid; and where the order is highly likely to be legally valid, it does nothing to fix the shortcomings. I encourage you to visit the Diocese of Fargo Web site (www.fargodiocese.org) or the North Dakota Catholic Conference Web site (www.ndcatholic.org) to view the comprehensive legal analysis by the USCCB legal staff of the abortion funding provided in this law.

On March 23rd, Cardinal Francis George, the Archbishop of Chicago and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote that, “We as Catholic bishops have opposed its passage because there is compelling evidence that it would expand the role of the federal government in funding and facilitating abortion and plans to cover abortion.” As Catholics, we cannot support something which helps some people while, at the same time, allows and funds, in part, the destruction of the most innocent among us, the unborn, and does not provide adequate conscience protection for those who are pro-life.

It is truly tragic that some groups who call themselves “Catholic” have come out in support of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The Catholic Health Association, Catholics United and some small groups of religious orders have supported the Act. In recent days, most sadly of all, these groups have received gratitude from pro-abortion forces. The influence of the

groups was seen in a particular way in our state. Congressman Earl Pomeroy cited the encouragement of “Catholic nuns” in defending his vote for the legislation (The Forum, March 22, 2010, “Pomeroy: Legislation ‘a lifesaver’”).

These so called “Catholic” groups acted in direct contradiction to the bishops as guardians of the authentic teaching of Jesus Christ and his Church on the sacredness of human life as so clearly expressed in the definitive teaching of the Church contained in **Evangelium Vitae**. The actions of these groups have betrayed the common good, undermined the teaching authority of the Church, and have disregarded the courageous witness by the Bishops and the many millions of faithful Catholics to the gift and dignity of human life. We now face the reality of severe damage to the common good by the expansion of abortion throughout our land because of the counter-witness of these groups. By undermining the legitimate authority of the Bishops, these groups, together with some of our Catholic legislators and laity, have weakened the bonds of communion within the Church and diluted her witness to justice for all, from the moment of conception until natural death.

The unfortunate reality for the past several years is that some Catholics on both sides of the aisle are more faithful to their political parties and ideological beliefs than to the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Church. Rather than being a leaven in their respective party and in society for the good, by ignoring the primacy of the truths of our Catholic faith, they pave the way for secularism and a culture of death.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States of America have continually and faithfully called for greater access to health care. This is a noble goal which must be pursued; however, the defects of this new law are just too great to overlook. In the face of this new law, we must remain steadfast in our witness to the human dignity of the most vulnerable and innocent – the unborn child. We must remain steadfast in our witness to conscience protection for those doctors, health care workers, Catholic institutions and the faithful laity who hold with science, reason and faith that human life begins at the moment of conception and always is to be protected.

I close with the words of Cardinal Francis George, “As bishops of the Catholic Church, we speak in the name of the Church and for the Catholic faith itself. The Catholic faith is not a partisan agenda, and we take this opportunity to recommit ourselves to working for health care which truly and fully safeguards the life, dignity, conscience and health of all, from the child in the womb to those in their last days on earth.”