



Action Alert!

Support Health Care Reform That Respects Life

July 27, 2009



Congress continues its work on three main health care reform bills—one in the House, two in the Senate.

House: On July 17, the Committees on Education and Labor and on Ways and Means favorably reported the America's Affordable Health Choices Act (H.R. 3200). During markup (markup is when Members debate and vote on amendments and the bill) these committees rejected amendments to exclude mandated coverage for abortion. The Committee on Energy and Commerce, also working on the America's Affordable Health Choices Act, interrupted its markup two weeks ago and has not yet resumed while House leadership and the committee chairman negotiate significant provisions of the bill, including abortion coverage and conscience protections, with conservative and pro-life Democrats. The committee may resume the markup this week. If so, amendments protecting conscience rights and excluding coverage for abortion will be offered.

House leadership has also said that they expect to bring the health care bill to the full House before the House recesses for the August break. The leadership has threatened to bring the bill to the floor regardless of action or inaction by the Energy and Commerce Committee. It is also widely expected that amendments will be offered on the floor protecting conscience rights and excluding coverage for abortion.

Senate: On July 15, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee voted out its bill, the Affordable Health Choices Act (not yet numbered). During markup the committee rejected amendments to exclude federal funding or mandated coverage for abortion and to maintain current state laws limiting and regulating abortion. The Senate Finance Committee continues to work on a bill that it hopes will be able to secure bipartisan support. It does not seem likely that an agreement will be reached before the Senate recesses for the August break.

On July 17, Bishop William Murphy, Chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, sent a letter to Congress saying, "The USCCB looks forward to working with you to reform health care successfully in a manner that offers accessible, affordable and quality health care that protects and respects the life and dignity of all people from conception until natural death." Abortion must not be included as part of a national health care benefit. "No health care reform plan should compel us or others to pay for the destruction of human life, whether through government funding or mandatory coverage of abortion." Bishop Murphy argued that any legislation should reflect longstanding policies "on abortion funding, mandates and conscience protections because they represent sound morality, wise policy and political reality." The full text of Bishop Murphy's letter can be found online at: www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/2009-07-17-murphy-letter-congress.pdf

ACTION: Contact Members through e-mail, phone calls or fax letters. Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at: 202-224-3121, or call the local offices of your Representative and Senators. Full contact info can be found on Members' web sites at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov . It is particularly important that members of the House of Representatives are contacted immediately.

MESSAGE:

1. Support long overdue health care reform that protects the life, dignity and health of all, as an important national priority and moral imperative.

2. Support essential efforts to keep in place longstanding and widely supported measures that: * prohibit federal funds to be used for abortion (with the exceptions in current law for cases of rape, incest and to protect the life of the mother); *do not mandate abortion coverage; and, *protect conscience rights of providers to not participate in abortion.

Urge members of the House to take whatever steps necessary in Committee or on the House Floor to oppose abortion funding, mandates or weakening of conscience protections. Imposing abortion coverage or funding is bad morality, bad policy and bad politics. Efforts to expand abortion will undermine attempts to pass needed reform.

3. Support effective measures to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children and all of society by expanding eligibility for public programs, such as Medicaid, to all low-income families and vulnerable people and offering adequate subsidies for cost-sharing of insurance premiums and out of pocket expenses.

WHEN: House Committee and floor votes could happen at any time. Thanks!

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