

Catholics and the health care debate

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 8, 2009 NCR Today

The health care debate [is heating up this week](#) [1] and the church has many issues at stake in the decisions that are being made. Yet, one wonders why the Obama administration would even allow the hierarchy, which spent much of the last three months protesting the president's appearance at Notre Dame, a seat at the table.

The poison pill for Catholics is, of course, federal funding of abortion. This has been banned by the Hyde Amendment of three decades now but the Obama administration did sign off on the District of Columbia's decision to use its funds for the procedure. That decision, however, did not involve federal funds. The concern is that if there is a government-run health insurance option in the final reform -- which is being fought on the grounds that it will stifle competition -- that option might include insurance for abortion.

The church should be lobbying for a government plan. If the government can provide a less expensive plan, why shouldn't Americans be free to choose it? The insurance companies want to maintain their monopoly, of course. Who wouldn't? But, legislators are not elected by the insurance companies and the crisis in health care costs requires any and all legal means to lower costs. Otherwise, Medicare and Medicaid will bust the federal budget and countless Americans will bust their budgets too.

Sources in the administration give differing accounts as to how all this will turn out. Catholics, like most Americans, want the president to fix the economy but Catholic voters multi-task. They do not want to see federal funding of abortion get snuck in through the backdoor of health care reform. The administration should not risk another fight with the bishops over this. Congress should pass universal health insurance that leaves the Hyde Amendment in tact. Otherwise, those Catholics swing voters who swung to Obama last November might swing back next November in the mid-term elections.

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[1] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/05/AR2009060504036.html>