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Bishops respond to Rep. Kennedy's criticism

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- Bishop Thomas J. Tobin of Providence and Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York strongly criticized remarks by Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., about the U.S. bishops' role in the health reform debate.

In an interview with Cybercast News Service Oct. 22, Kennedy said the bishops were fanning "the flames of dissent and discord" by insisting that health reform not include abortion funding.

"I can't understand for the life of me how the Catholic church could be against the biggest social justice issue of our time, where the very dignity of the human person is being respected by the fact that we're caring and giving health care" to the millions of people who are currently uninsured, Kennedy said in the CNSNews.com interview.

"You mean to tell me the Catholic church is going to be denying those people life-saving health care?" he added. "I thought they were pro-life. If the church is pro-life, then they ought to be for health care reform because it's going to provide health care that is going to keep people alive."

Tobin called Kennedy's comments "irresponsible and ignorant of the facts" in an Oct. 23 statement and said the congressman "owes us an apology."

"The bishops of the United States are indeed in favor of comprehensive health care reform and have been for many years," the bishop said. "But we are adamantly opposed to health care legislation that threatens the life of unborn children, requires taxpayers to pay for abortion, rations health care, or compromises the conscience of individuals."

Archbishop Dolan commented on the controversy Oct. 26 in his blog at www.ny-archdiocese.org, calling Kennedy's remarks "sad, uncalled for and inaccurate."
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"The Catholic community in the United States hardly needs to be lectured to about just health care," he added. "We bishops have been advocating for universal health care for a long, long time.

"All we ask is that it be just that -- universal -- meaning that it includes the helpless baby in the womb, the immigrant and grandma in the hospice, and that it protects a health care provider's right to follow his/her own conscience," Archbishop Dolan said.

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