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The USCCB Ramps Up on Health Care

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 29, 2009 NCR Today

The USCCB has prepared a bulletin insert [1]for all parishes regarding health care, entitled ?Tell Congress: Remove Abortion Funding & Mandates from Needed Health Care Reform.? There is one word in that title of the insert that, unfortunately, fails to find any amplification in the rest of the text ? ?Needed.?

The bishops? conference is entirely correct that now is the time to call your congressional representatives. Indeed, no matter what you political leanings, I think it is always a good thing when citizens are contacting their representatives to voice their opinions. But, as I have argued before [2], it is critical to the current debate that we Catholics marry our insistence that the health care reform not provide federal funding for abortion, or for abortion coverage, with an equally firm insistence that we want health care reform. We want to support this effort.

Republicans have decided to adopt a rejectionist stance on health care reform, so they are not going to decide the final outcome of this debate. The people, the only people, in a position to remove the abortion funding are pro-life Democrats and those Democrats who are not really pro-life but understand the concerns of pro-life voters and don?t want to see health care reform get shipwrecked over the issue.

Sources very close to the negotiations tell me they think that the Stupak amendment might, with some modification, pass the full House. But, the last thing we want is members putting in their chits on behalf of opposing the public option and not on behalf of restrictions for abortion funding. The person who is most likely to get a hearing from Speaker Nancy Pelosi is someone who will vote with her on the public option but also in favor of the Stupak Amendment.

So, I applaud the USCCB for its flyer. I just wish they had made more of the fact that health care reform is needed. It is. And if we support it, and are clear about our support, we have a better chance of winning support for Stupak?s amendment. If the leadership concludes that nothing will satisfy the USCCB, they have no reason to listen.

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[1] http://www.usccb.org/healthcare/hc-bulletin-insert-10-23-09-final.pdf
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/politics/reform-debate-pro-lifers-undermine-their-cause