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Catholic groups praise Sen. Casey health care proposal

Thomas C. Fox | Dec. 18, 2009 NCR Today

National Catholic social justice organizations, religious orders and the Catholic Health Association are touting a proposal offered by Sen. Robert Casey, Jr. of Pennsylvania that offers a major package of social supports for pregnant women and alternative language to ensure health-care reform does not include federal funding of abortions.

Sen. Casey?s proposal includes strong language on conscience protections for health care workers, and an ?opt out? provision that permits individuals to decline abortion coverage in any policy offered in a health-care exchange. It also increases adoption tax credits by $1,000 and ensures segregation of funds in the exchange so that federal subsidies are not used to pay for abortions. The proposal offers significant help to pregnant and parenting women, increases public awareness about resources available to pregnant teens and improves services for pregnant women who are victims of domestic violence.

?This is a major step forward that signals a profound commitment to ensuring health-care reform honors the dignity of the entire human family,? said Victoria Kovari, Interim Director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. ?It?s particularly important that we support low-income families and make sure pregnant women have access to critical services they deserve. This proposal is a model for Congress as deliberations move forward.?

?Sen. Casey has again demonstrated his leadership by guiding health-care legislation that not only ensures federal funding will not pay for abortions, but also offers crucial support for pregnant women so that no one considers abortion their only option,? said Stephen Schneck, director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America. ?This is a tremendous pro-life victory for social justice, human dignity and the common good.?

The Catholic Health Association, the largest network of Catholic hospitals in the country, also released a statement expressing support for the direction of Sen. Casey?s amendment. ?While we have yet to see the manager's amendment or Senator Robert Casey's final abortion amendment language, we are encouraged by recent deliberations and the outline Senator Casey is developing,? the statement said.

?It is our understanding that the language now being written would prohibit federal funding of abortion, ensure provider conscience protection and fund programs to provide supportive care to some of the most vulnerable pregnant women in our society. Especially now that a public health insurance option is no longer on the table, we are increasingly confident that Senator Casey's language can achieve the objective of no federal funding for abortion. We urge Congress to continue its work toward the goal of health reform that protects life at all stages while expanding coverage to the greatest possible number of people in our country. We look forward to reviewing the final language these improvements contemplate.?

NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby on Capitol Hill, also expressed support for the measure.

?I applaud the work of Sen. Casey to find an effective way to promote life within the health-care reform act

currently being considered by the Senate,? said Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK. ?We have worked for years for effective supportive services for pregnant women. The inclusion of these key services, while also segregating funding to prevent public payment for abortion, makes the bill that is emerging from the Senate the best way forward to protect the lives of all Americans. We urge all Senators who care about supporting pregnant women to support health-care reform as the best way to protect life.?

Marlene Weisenbeck, President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, said:

?As president of LCWR, which strongly supports health care legislation that will expand coverage to most people in the U.S. and will protect human life at all stages, I am encouraged by the efforts of Sen. Casey to propose language that will achieve needed financial assistance for pregnant women without federal funding for abortion as well as provide conscience protection. We are pleased to learn of the efforts being made to improve the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009.?

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