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Pro-life group urges Congress to pass Senate health care bill

Thomas C. Fox | Mar. 12, 2010 NCR Today

Twenty-five pro-life Catholic theologians and Evangelical leaders yesterday sent letters to members of Congress urging them not to let misleading information about abortion provisions in the Senate health care bill block passage of sorely-needed reform.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, a Washington-based advocacy group, said that the Senate health bill upholds abortion funding restrictions and supports pregnant women.

The letter included a page by page analysis of the Senate bill as it pertains to abortion.

The group asked members of Congress ?to make an informed decision about this legislation based on careful deliberation guided by facts.?

?We believe that the provisions below provide extensive evidence that longstanding restrictions on federal funding of abortion have been maintained. Furthermore, this bill provides new and important supports for vulnerable pregnant women,? the letter states.

The complete text of the letter follows:

Dear Member of Congress,

As Christians committed to a consistent ethic of life, and deeply concerned with the health and well-being of all people, we want to see health care reform enacted. Our nation has a rare and historic opportunity to expand coverage to tens of millions of people, make coverage more affordable for all families, and crack down on many of the most harmful practices of the health insurance industry.

We are writing because of our concern about the lack of clear and accurate information regarding abortion provisions in the health care reform bill passed by the Senate on December 24, 2009.

Reforming our health care system is necessarily complex, and the provisions related to abortion, or any other issue, require careful examination of the facts as they exist in the legislative language. We believe that the provisions below provide extensive evidence that longstanding restrictions on federal funding of abortion have been maintained. Furthermore, this bill provides new and important supports for vulnerable pregnant women.

Following is a comprehensive factual listing of all provisions related to abortion and positive supports for pregnant women in HR 3590, along with specific page references.

Abortion-Related Provisions Included in the Senate-Approved Health Care Reform Bill ?Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act? (HR 3590 EAS/PP)

· Prohibits the Secretary of HHS from requiring the coverage of any abortion services as part of the essential health benefits for any qualified health plan offered in a state insurance Exchange (pg. 2070);

· Allows the insurance company to decide whether or not to include coverage of abortion services, including the Hyde abortion exceptions, in a qualified health insurance plan offered in a state insurance Exchange (pg. 2070);

· Prohibits insurance companies from using federal funds, including federal tax credits and cost-sharing assistance, to pay for abortion services except for those services allowable under the Hyde amendment (pg. 2071);

· Requires an insurance company that chooses to offer a plan in a State Exchange with abortion coverage, beyond the Hyde abortion exceptions, to collect a separate second premium payment from each enrollee for the cost of the abortion coverage (pgs. 2071-2072 & 2074-2075);

· Requires the insurance company to deposit all separate payments into a separate account that consists solely of abortion premium payments and that it is used exclusively to pay for such services (pgs. 2072-2074);

· Requires the state health insurance commissioners to ensure that insurance companies comply with these requirements in accordance with guidance and accounting standards set by the Office of Management and Budget and the Government Accountability Office (pg. 2075);

· Requires insurance companies that offer general abortion coverage as part of a qualified health plan to provide a notice of coverage in the summary of benefits and coverage explanation (pg. 2076);

· Allows states to pass a law prohibiting the inclusion of abortion coverage in plans offered in a state health insurance Exchange (pg. 2069);

· Requires the director of the Office of Public Management to ensure that there is at least one private, multi-state qualified health plan offered in each state insurance Exchange that does not provide coverage of abortion services beyond the Hyde exceptions (pgs. 2087-2088);

· Prohibits insurance companies offering qualified health plans from discriminating against any individual health care provider or health care facility because of its unwillingness to provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions (pg. 2076);

· Prohibits the preemption of state laws regarding abortion (pg. 2077);

· Maintains current Federal laws relative to conscience protection; willingness or refusal to provide abortion; and discrimination on the basis of the willingness or refusal to provide, pay for, cover, or refer for abortion or to provide or participate in training to provide abortion (pg. 2077);

· Establishes and provides $250 million for programs to support vulnerable pregnant women (pgs. 2170-2173); and

· Increases the adoption tax credit and makes it refundable so that lower income families can access the tax credit (pgs 2400-2407).

We are now at a critical moment in the history of our country. More than 30 million Americans may finally gain access to a health care system that is affordable -- providing families, children and seniors with fundamental

care that is essential to human dignity. We respectfully ask that you make an informed decision about this legislation based on careful deliberation guided by facts.

Sincerely,

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Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

Ron Sider
President
Evangelicals for Social Action

Rev. Jim Wallis
President and CEO
Sojourners

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