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CHA exec committee meets Vatican officials

by John Thavis by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The executive committee of the Catholic Health Association met with officials of several top Vatican agencies for talks that focused in part on the association's support for health reform legislation that the U.S. bishops opposed.

Sr. Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who is CHA president and chief executive, told Catholic News Service May 26 that the meetings at the Vatican were "useful and positive," and that the group was well-received. She would not comment on particular issues raised in the talks.

"We were very cordially received and had a wonderful exchange of ideas," she said.

Vatican sources also refused comment on particulars raised in the various meetings, but they said Vatican officials had clearly spelled out their views.

The group met with officials of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry and the Secretariat of State, among others.

This spring, Keehan and the CHA expressed public support for the final version of U.S. health care reform legislation, passed by Congress in March, after Keehan said she was convinced it would not fund abortions. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed the measure, saying its provisions on abortion funding and conscience protections were morally unacceptable.

While the Vatican generally avoided public pronouncements during the U.S. health care debate, Vatican officials were known to have been perplexed at the CHA's unwillingness to follow the bishops' position on the issue.

Keehan said the CHA executive committee's meetings at the Vatican were routine, done every two years.

"We were not sent for," she said.

She said that over the years, the meetings have offered a useful exchange of perspectives.

"We have worked to understand the universal church, particularly as it's governed by the Vatican, and also to make sure they understood the very different health care scene in the United States. And my sense is there's a great appreciation for the extensiveness and the mission of Catholic health care in the United States," she said.

CHA is a professional association of administrators and sponsors at the 620 Catholic hospitals and hundreds of other health care facilities in the United States. Its executive committee is made up of senior leaders and board members of the organization, and is headed by M. Colleen Scanlon, a registered nurse and lawyer who is senior vice president for advocacy at Catholic Health Initiatives in Denver.

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