

BISHOPS SPEAK OUT ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been the leading advocate for universal health care for decades. While initially supportive of congressional efforts to pass health care reform, the bishops withdrew their support in light of abortion being funded under legislative proposals. In addition, conscience rights were not being protected. As the debate unfolded nationally, many bishops spoke up about the proposed health care reforms. Below is a selection of comments from bishops on this subject:

- **Cardinal Justin F. Rigali of Archdiocese of Philadelphia, PA:** “At a time when so much good will is being shown to create an equitable, affordable and just health care system in the United States, it would be tragic if this praiseworthy end were corrupted by including an immoral means, namely provisions for abortion. This would not be health care.”

- **Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Archdiocese of Denver, CO:** “The whole meaning of ‘health care’ would be subverted by any plan that involves mandated abortion access or abortion funding. The reason is obvious. Killing or funding the killing of unborn children has nothing to do with promoting human health, and including these things in any ‘health care’ proposal, no matter how shrewdly hidden, would simply be a form of lying.”

- **Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Archdiocese of Kansas City, KS and Bishop Robert W. Finn of Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, MO:** “Solidarity and the Promotion of the Common Good cause us to say that we cannot be passive concerning health care policy in our country. There is important work to be done, but ‘change’ for change’s sake; change which expands the reach of government beyond its competence would do more harm

than good. Change which loses sight of man's transcendent dignity or the irreplaceable value of human life; change which could diminish the role of those in need as agents of their own care is not truly human progress at all."

- **Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Diocese of Arlington, VA:** "The truly vigilant realize that it is not reforming the health care system in itself that is wrong – in fact some reform is needed. Rather, it is the specific proposals included in that reform that could endanger the lives of the unborn, and the freedom of conscience of health care providers and citizens."

- **Bishop Samuel J. Aquila of Diocese of Fargo, ND:** "In principle, the Church ought to always promote wider and more complete access to health care; however, that does not mean that in practice the Church ought to support each and every plan which is proposed by civil leaders."

- **Archbishop John C. Nienstedt of the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN:** "Reform is needed. But the underlying question remains: What kind of health care reform do we want? Given the vast range of ethical and moral issues involved, this legislation will manifest in a clear and even remarkable way what values we will hold or fail to uphold as a nation. In a very real way, this legislation will define our national character."

- **Bishop Blase J. Cupich of Diocese of Rapid City, SD:** "In the face of powerful pressures in a consumerist society, we should not overlook in this moment of health care reform the need to exercise moderation in a world of abundance. If we say that health care is a right rooted in our belief in human dignity, then we need to respect our own life and dignity by adopting lifestyles that enhance our health and well-being."

- **Bishop Thomas G. Doran of Diocese of Rockford, IL:** "Our federal bureaucracy is a vast wasteland strewn with the carcasses of absurd federal programs which proved infinitely

worse than the problems they were established to correct. It perhaps is too extreme to say that competent government is an oxymoron, but sometimes it seems that way. The moral principal of subsidiarity implies decreasing the role of government and employers in health care when lower order groups can better serve individuals and families. We need to think of health care as more of a market than a system."

• **Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone of Diocese of Charleston, SC:** "It is quite evident that there is much discussion in many quarters about the proposed health care reform bills in the houses of Congress. There are many issues that people throughout our country are concerned about, but there are some issues that are critical for us as Catholics and it is imperative that our voice be heard."

• **Bishop R. Walker Nickless of Diocese of Sioux City, IA:** "First and most important, the Church will not accept any legislation that mandates coverage, public or private, for abortion, euthanasia, or embryonic stem-cell research. We refuse to be made complicit in these evils, which frankly contradict what 'health care' should mean. We refuse to allow our own parish, school, and diocesan health insurance plans to be forced to include these evils. As a corollary of this, we insist equally on adequate protection of individual rights of conscience for patients and health care providers not to be made complicit in these evils. A so-called reform that imposes these evils on us would be far worse than keeping the health care system we now have."