

“CONSCIENCE PROTECTION” AFFIRMED

On September 9, the House of Representatives voted to approve a bill that maintains a “conscience protection” clause for Catholic hospitals. The clause is needed to protect Catholic hospitals and individual health care providers from governmental attempts to force them to provide, pay for, or refer abortions.

Monsignor William P. Fay, General Secretary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Father Michael D. Place, President and CEO of the Catholic Health Association of the U.S., and Dr. John D. Lane, President of the Catholic Medical Association, wrote a letter to every member of the House imploring them not to change the language of the bill. They cited hospitals in Alaska, New Jersey and New Mexico which were discriminated against because of their pro-life policies.

In Alaska, a court had forced a community hospital to provide a late-term abortion that was contrary to its own policies. In New Jersey, attempts were made to force a Catholic health care system to build an abortion clinic on its premises. And in New Mexico, state legislators refused to approve a hospital lease because the community-owned hospital declined to perform abortions.

The Catholic League stood ready to fight for the right of Catholic hospitals to refuse to provide abortions, but was not needed to do so in this instance. It is a credit to Monsignor Fay, Father Place and Dr. Lane that their efforts prevailed.

Unhappy with the result was Catholics For a Free Choice. The anti-Catholic and pro-abortion group sent out a blistering news release decrying the bill. “The federal refusal clause is not about protecting religious freedom, it is about denying

religious freedom to women and doctors who lose the right to provide or receive medical services based on their conscience, as opposed to that of the health facility from which they seek services,” said Jon O’Brien, vice president of the group. He added that “The federal refusal clause discriminates against women.”

O’Brien has it backwards: attempts to force Catholic hospitals to provide abortion services discriminates against them on the basis of religion. But we wouldn’t expect this to resonate with an organization whose mission it is to sunder the Catholic Church