

OBAMA PIVOTS ON CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

In his address to the 2009 graduating class at the University of Notre Dame, President Barack Obama said that he supports conscience rights for healthcare workers. "Let's honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion," he said, "and draft a sensible conscience clause, and make sure that all of our health care policies are grounded in clear ethics and sound science, as well as respect for the equality of women."

We issued a news release applauding the president's statement and we weren't the only ones who were grateful. Cardinal Francis George, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, commended the president's promise to "honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion." He continued, "Caring health professionals and institutions should know that their deeply held religious or moral convictions will be respected as they exercise their right to serve patients in need." Obama's statement also fired up U.S. Reps. James Sensenbrenner and Chris Smith who in a letter called on the president to "commit to defending conscience protections in future rule-making." Rep. Smith made it clear that they were simply asking him to make sure "that his deeds match his words."

Last August, the Bush administration strengthened the conscience rights of healthcare workers in a new set of guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). But in March, the Obama administration said it was going to rescind these rights. It specifically said, "The Department [HHS] is proposing to rescind in its entirety the final rule."

As this issue of *Catalyst* went to press, no final decision has been made. But given what President Obama said at Notre Dame,

it seems clear that he is prepared to rescind the decision that was made in March. For this he should be commended. We look forward to reading the revised proposal.