

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Eye on the Capitol
November 18, 2009

STUPAK AMENDMENT PRESERVES LONG-STANDING PROTECTIONS

By Kim Wadas, Associate Director, Education and Health Care

Abortion proponents raised a public outcry after passage of the House health care bill earlier this month. They criticized action taken by 240 members of the House of Representatives to approve an amendment offered by Representative Bart Stupak (D–Michigan). The Stupak amendment maintains a “status quo” approach to the federal funding of abortion.

The inclusion of the Stupak amendment in the House bill shocked those who would like taxpayers to pay for abortion coverage. Their reaction has been to misrepresent the amendment’s impact by suggesting that it will reach beyond current law.

They are wrong.

The truth is that the Stupak amendment does no more than maintain current law. It does so by ensuring that health care reform does not expand coverage for abortion beyond what is currently allowed. For years, Medicaid, Medicare, and other federal public benefit programs have not covered abortion, except in limited circumstances. These exceptions permit abortion coverage in cases where there is a danger to the mother’s life, or when a pregnancy results from rape or incest. For those who participate in these federal programs, including those who are poor, nothing changes.

For years, federal health benefits programs have covered care and treatment for individuals, but not abortion. The Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) provides coverage to the nation’s over 8 million federal employees, retirees, and their dependents. It does not cover elective abortion. The TRICARE plan covers military families. It also does not cover abortion. The Stupak amendment does not change either plan.

Nor does the amendment change the rules for private insurance plans. Private insurance providers who do not receive public assistance and wish to offer private plans may continue to cover a multitude of services, including abortion.

What did occur earlier this month was recognition, by a strong majority of our U.S. Representatives, that individuals should not be required to trade their moral principles for universal access to affordable health care.

Throughout the debate on health care reform, the Catholic message regarding health care has been consistent. Health care reform legislation: 1) must provide universal access to quality care for all, with an emphasis on care for the poor and vulnerable; and 2) it should maintain the current limitations regarding abortion.

Critics may continue to distort the effects of the Stupak amendment. It falls to us to remind our fellow citizens that the amendment preserves a policy that has endured for over three decades under administrations of both parties – that federal dollars should not subsidize the taking of human life.

Such a humane policy reflects what President Abraham Lincoln once called “the better angels of our nature.” It ensures that health care reform retains its focus on health care and not on rewriting abortion laws. It belongs in any reform legislation.

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