

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
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December 16, 2009

Worthy State Deputy:

The U.S. Senate is currently considering health care reform legislation that would mandate abortion coverage in insurance plans and would allow for the use of federal funds for elective abortions. In its current form, the Senate bill fails to keep in place the longstanding federal policy against the use of federal funds for abortion. It also fails to protect the conscience rights of health care providers that refuse to participate in abortion.

Last month a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives amended the House version of the health care reform bill to prohibit abortion funding. That successful effort was spearheaded by a brother Knight, Congressman Bart Stupak. In the Senate, however, a similar amendment to remove abortion funding was narrowly defeated last week. The U.S. Bishops called that defeat a "grave mistake" and added that the Senate "should not approve this bill in its current form."

The U.S. Bishops are asking all Catholics to contact their Senators to urge them to not support the bill in its current form and amend the bill so it upholds longstanding policies against the federal funding of abortion.

I ask that you contact every Knight in your state to do the same. Please go to the Knights of Columbus homepage at www.kofc.org for more information about the bill and for instructions on how to contact your senators.

Time is of the essence, as the Senate is expected to continue to debate and amend the bill until the Christmas recess.

Fraternally,



Carl A. Anderson
Supreme Knight

P.S., Please find attached a copy of my recent article on Catholic conscience and the health care debate. As Catholics we have a moral obligation to prevent this health care reform legislation from becoming the largest expansion of abortion in our country since *Roe v. Wade*.

HEALTH CARE, POLITICIANS AND THE CATHOLIC CONSCIENCE

A Troubling New Development Appears in American Politics

By Carl Anderson

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut, DEC. 7, 2009 (Zenit.org).- For decades, Americans have been subjected to the arguments of certain Catholic politicians who argued that while "personally opposed" to unjust policies like abortion, they were nonetheless unwilling to "impose" that view on the rest of the country.

The argument was disingenuous, premised on the fact that somehow a "Catholic" conscience had to be put to the side in the public square.

Now, the very people who argued that they couldn't bring their private conscience into a secular public square are poised to use the law to impose a particular view on their fellow Catholics.

By working and voting to include abortion coverage in health care legislation, several Catholic politicians stand at the precipice of being the deciding votes in forcing a particular immoral view on their fellow Catholics, by forcing them to fund abortion through their tax dollars.

While professing that they cannot impose their conscience on anyone else, these politicians seem to have little hesitation about imposing a political view -- one they claim to oppose in principle -- on the consciences of their fellow Catholics.

Far from Kennedy

Catholic politicians willing to forsake their own consciences and impose a directly anti-Catholic view on others have come a long way from the legacy of American history's highest profile Catholic statesman, John F. Kennedy, who while discussing his role as a Catholic and candidate for president said: "If the time should ever come -- and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible -- when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same."

And while some might consider that Catholic politicians have disagreed with the public policy recommendations of their bishops in a variety of areas, the key is this: Many issues are prudential and open to reasonable disagreement; but the inalienable right to life in the context of abortion is not -- it is fundamental and it may not be compromised.

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger -- now Benedict XVI -- noted about Catholic politicians in 2004: "Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion."

He added: "While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion."

Unjust law

Catholic politicians must now consider the effect of national legislation mandating Catholic cooperation in abortion. In his famous pro-life encyclical, "Evangelium Vitae," Pope John Paul II said: "The passing of unjust laws often raises difficult problems of conscience for morally upright people with regard to the issue of cooperation, since they have a right to demand not to be forced to take part in morally evil actions."

He said further: "Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. [...]"

"This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it. Each individual in fact has moral responsibility for the acts which he personally performs; no one can be exempted from this responsibility, and on the basis of it everyone will be judged by God himself" (74).

It is doubly ironic that a law that would force millions to violate their conscience by paying their taxes and would entangle thousands of Catholic physicians, nurses, hospitals and charities in the evil of abortion is being considered at precisely a time when the majority of Americans -- in greater and greater numbers -- are increasingly becoming more pro-life.

Catholic public officials in Washington have the power to prevent this moral tragedy from happening. They should not hesitate to do so.

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Carl Anderson is the supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus and a New York Times bestselling author.

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