

Obama to join faith-based national teleconference on health care reform

Jerry Filteau | Aug. 17, 2009 NCR Today

President Barack Obama will participate Aug. 19 in a national teleconference on health care reform sponsored by an interfaith coalition.

The 5 p.m. (EDT) conference call will also be available as a live audio stream on the Internet at www.sojo.net/obamacall or at <http://faithforhealth.org>.

Health care reform "is a theological, biblical, moral issue," said the Rev. Jim Wallis, executive director and CEO of Sojourners, a progressive evangelical organization that is hosting the teleconference. "Our health insurance system is broken. Our system is sick. It is a threat to the nation's soul."

In an Aug. 10 conference call with journalists Wallis and other faith leaders expressed dismay at what they termed the lies and misinformation being spread widely by opponents of health care reform.

"Moral people can disagree" on details of the proposed reform, said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, "but this is not going to be about the details, but on the moral imperative to act."

"Forty-seven million people are falling through the cracks. They're as likely to be Republican as (they are to be) Democrat," Saperstein said. "We come to this because it is a human rights issue."

"Every so often an issue is so clear and compelling, or so alarming and disconcerting, that it galvanizes the faith community," Wallis said. He called health care reform "one of those fundamental human and religious issues" that fits the category.

"There are people in the country who want to stop an honest, fair, civil discourse" on the issue, but religious leaders across the country are insisting that "there will be a conversation, and it will be a moral conversation," he said.

The Obama teleconference is part of a national interfaith "40 Days for Health Reform" campaign that has included scores of regional prayer events with members of Congress and a call for clergy of all faiths to preach on health care the weekend of Aug. 28-30.

In September the interfaith coalition plans meetings across the country with members of Congress, prayer rallies, and grassroots online and call-in campaigns to encourage Congress to pass a health reform act.