

## Bishops gain an ear on Capitol Hill

NCR Editorial Staff | Nov. 23, 2009



© Cherylcase | Dreamstime.com

At long last, much needed U.S. health care reform came a step closer to realization Nov. 7 when the House of Representatives approved a bill containing the most sweeping changes in more than four decades.

The measure addresses many of the inadequacies that have long plagued the health care system.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, often an uncompromising exponent of the most liberal Democratic positions, proved the ultimate pragmatist as the issue headed to a vote. In order to make it work, she turned her back on the unyielding pro-choice lobby and inserted an amendment, advanced by Catholic U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak of Michigan, that reinforces an existing ban on the use of federal money for the procurement of abortions.

The Stupak Amendment articulated a position that the Catholic bishops had rightly and forcefully advanced in the run-up to the final vote. Some argue that the bishops crossed state-church lines, but all the reporting showed that pro-choice advocates had equal access to the process and the legislators. While we have argued with the bishops' single-issue political strategy in the past, this was a case in which they were doing what religious leaders should do -- speaking forcefully to those with power about an issue on which they have strong convictions.

In the give-and-take world of politics, the compromise this time went their way.

The hope is that the bishops, having won a restriction on abortion, will argue as forcefully and expend the same energy in rallying the Catholic community to push for approval of a similar bill in the Senate.

The bishops were able to gain an ear on Capitol Hill in no small part because of their previous cooperation with largely Democratic initiatives aiding the poor and marginalized, and because health care reform has been on the bishops' legislative agenda for years.

Ellen Nissenbaum, legislative director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, told columnist James Oliphant that the church played a critical role in a number of initiatives over many years that affect our most vulnerable people. Their work has made a tremendous difference on fundamental issues of poverty and economic justice.

That work can often get lost in the political heat of the moment, but it is what underpins the conference's credibility in the public square.

The bishops of the United States have long seen health care as a right that should be afforded everyone regardless of ability to pay. Despite polls that show majority citizen approval for universal health care, including a public option, tremendous forces are arrayed against reform and they will be focused on gutting any substantive change in the Senate version of reform.

It is time for the entire Catholic community to weigh in on the need for meaningful health care reform that will provide universal coverage. It is a matter of justice, long overdue.

**Support independent reporting on important issues.**



---

**Source URL (retrieved on 07/24/2017 - 05:32):** <https://www.ncronline.org/news/bishops-gain-ear-capitol-hill>

**Links:**

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>