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Nuns: Vote for health bill would be 'life-affirming'

by Catholic News Service



U.S. President Barack Obama confers with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 17, following a St. Patrick's Day lunch with Ireland's Prime Minister Brian Cowen. Obama and Pelosi have been pushing for passage of health reform, hoping for a vote by March 20. (CNS photo/Jason Reed, Reuters)

WASHINGTON -- The leaders of more than four dozen U.S. congregations of women religious are urging members of Congress to "cast a life-affirming 'yes' vote" on the Senate's version of health reform legislation.

"Despite false claims to the contrary, the Senate bill will not provide taxpayer funding for elective abortions," they said in a letter delivered to all members of Congress March 17. "It will uphold long-standing conscience protections and it will make historic new investments -- \$250 million -- in support of pregnant women."

Their letter came two days after the U.S. bishops restated their objections to provisions in the measure they said would expand federal funding of abortions.

Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said March 15 that the bishops were "not quibbling over technicalities" and that the bill deliberately omitted "the necessary language that could have taken this moral question off the table."

In their letter the nuns said theirs "is the real pro-life stance, and we as Catholics are all for" the health bill.

Signers of the letter include the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the superiors or leadership teams of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; Adrian Dominican Sisters; Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration; Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Sisters of the Holy Family; Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis; Society of the Holy Child Jesus; and dozens of other religious orders.

In all, the signers represent 59,000 Catholic women religious in the United States, the letter said.

"We have witnessed firsthand the impact of our national health care crisis, particularly its impact on women, children and people who are poor," it said. "We see the toll on families who have delayed seeking care due to a lack of health insurance coverage or lack of funds with which to pay high deductibles and co-pays. We have counseled and prayed with men, women and children who have been denied health care coverage by insurance companies."

The women religious said they joined with the Catholic Health Association, "which represents 1,200 Catholic sponsors, systems, facilities and related organizations, in saying: The time is now for health reform and the Senate bill is a good way forward."

Cardinal George said changes must be made in the Senate-passed health bill's abortion language before the House considers it, while Sister Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who is CHA president and CEO, said changes can be made later if needed.

Although they called the Senate bill "an imperfect measure," the women religious said it would "expand coverage to over 30 million uninsured Americans" and "is a crucial next step in realizing health care for all."

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They pledged to hold prayer vigils for health care reform nationwide and said members of their communities would be asked to contact members of Congress to urge passage of the Senate bill.

"For us, this health care reform is a faith mandate for life and dignity of all of our people," they said.

A copy of the letter is here: [Thousands of Catholic sisters support health care reform](#)

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