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Health care vote reaction round-up

by NCR Staff by Wire Services



U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., speaks as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., looks on after the passage of the health care reform bill at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 21. The House of Representatives passed the measure late in the evening with a 219-212 vote after more than a year of partisan debate. (CNS photo/Joshua Roberts)

In a close 219-212 vote, the U.S. House of Representatives voted last night to pass the Senate's version of health care reform. After more than a year of debate the final version of the bill now awaits President Obama's signature.

The House rejected a last-ditch effort to send a package of legislative fixes back to committee in order to insert language on abortion supported by the U.S. bishops. The vote on the reconciliation package, which concluded shortly before midnight, was 220-211. Twenty-three Democrats joined all 178 House Republicans in opposing the measure.

The House votes came only after Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., obtained a promise from the White House that President Barack Obama would sign an executive order stipulating that the Hyde amendment would apply to the health reform legislation.

The White House has not indicated when Obama will sign the health reform bill or issue the executive order. Unconfirmed news reports said Obama would sign the bill March 23.

Passage of the reform package has spurred reactions from every side in the Catholic world. Here's a few of the most prominent, with excerpts and links to full statements when possible.

[Editor's Note: This story will be updated throughout the day with more reactions.]

Catholic News Service reports:

There was no immediate comment on the votes from the **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**, which said in a March 20 letter to the House the Hyde amendment must be included in the final health reform measure. The bishops also had urged enhanced conscience protections.

Reacting to news that Obama had struck a deal to sign an executive order limiting funding for abortion in the new health care scheme, Richard Doerflinger, the associate director of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, said that such an order does not address the Bishop's concerns about the now passed Senate bill:

Unfortunately, this proposal does not begin to address the problem, which arises from decades of federal appellate rulings that apply the principles of *Roe v. Wade* to federal health legislation. According to these rulings, such health legislation creates a statutory requirement for abortion funding, unless Congress clearly forbids such funding. That is why the Hyde amendment was needed in 1976, to stop Medicaid from funding 300,000 abortions a year. The statutory mandate construed by the courts would override any executive order or regulation. This is the unanimous view of our legal advisors and of the experts we have consulted on abortion jurisprudence. Only a change in the law enacted by Congress, not an executive order, can begin to address this very serious problem in the legislation.

Catholic Health Association

Advertisement

Sr. Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who is president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, praised the legislation, saying it "represents great progress in the long effort to make health care available and affordable to everyone in the United States." She urged the Senate to take quick action to pass the reconciliation package.

The National Right to Life Committee

The National Right to Life Committee released a statement criticizing Obama's executive order:

The executive order promised by President Obama was issued for political effect. It changes nothing. It does not correct any of the serious pro-abortion provisions in the bill. The president cannot amend a bill by issuing an order, and the federal courts will enforce what the law says.

Catholic Democrats

Steve Krueger, national director of Catholic Democrats, hailed the vote as a "day of Thanksgiving for the American people:"

For those who are not rejoicing today, we hope they will in the years ahead when the divisive politics that threatened a stronger life-affirming future for our nation is a distant memory and their children and grandchildren have health security - and health costs no longer threaten our free market economy. The vision of Democrats to protect human rights has prevailed once again, helping define the character of our country. As the nuns told us this week, 'health care reform is a faith mandate for life and dignity of all of our people.'

Catholics for Choice

Catholics for Choice, a group which says it supports a woman's right to follow her conscience regarding abortion, said the last minute executive order misled the American people and called the Catholic bishops 'extremist' and 'dishonest':

Now, to add insult to injury, President Obama has agreed at the last moment to issue an Executive Order that extended the antichoice elements of this already restrictive law. He extended refusal rights of a kind that he had previously denounced when they were introduced by President George W. Bush. He also extended the Hyde Amendment, which bans all federal funding of abortion, to the newly-created health insurance exchanges. In short, we were assured that nobody would be worse off under a reformed system. On each of these points, the American people have been misled.

...

However, when it came to the end game, the bishops decided that their opposition to abortion was more important than everything else. It was on the basis of their extremist and dishonest interpretation of the sections on abortion that the bishops decided that they would oppose passage of the bill. In so doing, they proved that rather than being leaders for social justice and advocates for the poor and marginalized, they were marching in lockstep alongside the most extremist fringe in the antichoice lobby. Shame on them.

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

Morna Murray, president of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, said passage of the bill recognizes there is "nothing more fundamental to our core Catholic principles than caring for the sick and most vulnerable:"

Signing these bills into law finally begins the process of fixing a healthcare system that has failed to serve Americans, particularly the poor and vulnerable. Healthcare reform will save lives, end insurance company abuses, and make quality health care affordable for 32 million Americans who now lack access to health insurance. Catholics and all Americans who know that quality and affordable health care is a human right -- not a luxury for the privileged few-- have achieved a monumental victory.

Catholic Advocate

Deal Hudson, president of Catholic Advocate, called Obama's executive order a 'betrayal:'

Today's vote will go down in history as one of the greatest expansions of abortion since Roe v. Wade. On November 2, American Catholics need to hold members of the House accountable for this betrayal.

NETWORK

Sr. Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK, is planning to attend the signing ceremony for the bill March 23. In a public statement she expressed gratitude for the passing of the legislation:

Today, we want to express our deep gratitude to our elected officials who supported extending healthcare to 32 million people in the United States while not changing existing law on federal funding of abortion. We also celebrate the many voices of faith who engaged in dialogue about the legislation. Although we did not all agree about specifics in the bill, this important dialogue demonstrated our shared faith value for the sanctity of life.

[Contributing to this report were Joshua McElwee of NCR and Catholic News Service.]

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