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USCCB Statement on Health Care Law

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NCR Today

The USCCB has issued a statement, approved unanimously by their administrative committee which met in Washington today, on the health care reform bill that President Barack Obama signed into law today. In a word, the statement is balanced.

The bishops' statement begins with praise for those parts of the law that extend coverage to millions of previously uninsured Americans. They are almost fulsome in their commendations for the effort to provide universal coverage: "We are bishops, and therefore pastors and teachers. In that role, we applaud the effort to expand health care to all."

The bishops go on to restate their objections to the bill, specifically as they regard abortion, conscience protections, and care for immigrants. The bishops quite rightly call for vigilance a task that falls especially upon those of use pro-life Catholics who supported the bill. There are promises that were made, assurances that this bill would not result in government funding for abortion. Laws are not just written, they are implemented, and if the Administration were to try and find a way to shirk those promises or skirt around the clear intention of both the law and the accompanying Executive Order, we should be first in line to cry "foul." It is an axiom of life that one should never trust a politician, but it is also true that you can almost always trust a politician to pursue his or her political self-interest. I fail to see what electoral benefit President Obama would receive from renegeing on his promise to ensure that health care reform does not end up permitting any federal funding of abortion.

What is most noticeable about the statement from the USCCB is what is not in it. There are no denunciations of those Catholics who, in good conscience, reached a conclusion different from that reached by the bishops. As noted by Joe Feuerhard, some bishops have indulged such condemnations, most notably Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver. It is reassuring to see that a unanimous vote of the

USCCB administrative committee did not go down the path followed by Chaput.

One wonders if the bishops' statements before the vote had attained this level of balance, if their influence might not have been greater. It is doubtful. There were fifty members of the pro-choice caucus ready to defeat the bill if it enacted the original Stupak language favored by the bishops. As well, there were no Republicans ? not one, let alone fifty ? who were willing to endorse health care reform if it did provide the abortion restrictions the bishops sought. It is not enough to condemn pro-choice groups for the failure to achieve what the bishops sought; the GOP's intransigence deserves just as much blame.

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