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Obama, Casey laud Catholic Health Association

by John L. Allen Jr.

NCR Today

Denver, Colorado -- In a video tribute played during the annual assembly of the Catholic Health Association this morning, President Barack Obama lauded the association for its "help and courage in passing health care reform."

Obama also praised Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan, President of the Catholic Health Association, for "the extraordinary leadership she's shown in advancing our national discussion."

The Catholic Health Association, representing Catholic hospitals and health care systems in America, is holding its annual assembly in Denver, Colorado, June 13-15.

During the recent national debate over health care reform, the Catholic Health Association supported the legislation backed by the White House, while the U.S. bishops opposed it. The bishops argued that the new law, signed by Obama on March 23, compels taxpayers to fund elective abortion coverage, while the CHA argued that the package does not expand federal funding of abortion.

U. S. Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, a pro-life Democrat who backed the health care reform measure, also appeared in the video played this morning before 800 leaders of Catholic hospitals and health care systems.

"I can say without any hesitation that if the Catholic Health Association were not involved in this effort, it's highly likely we wouldn't be able to pass the bill," Casey said.

"It was the right thing to do to pass this legislation," Casey said. "It's pro-life legislation, and we're going to continue to call upon the Catholic Health Association for work as we implement this legislation, not just in the near term but over time."

The following is the full text of Obama's message to the Catholic Health Association assembly:

"Hello everybody. Today I want to thank everybody at the Catholic Health Association for your help and courage in passing health care reform, a major victory for our nation, for human dignity, and for the most vulnerable among us."

"I especially want to thank Sr. Carol Keehan for the extraordinary leadership she's shown in advancing our national discussion. I know your ministry has been working for decades to make sure that everyone can afford quality health care. Now, thanks to your efforts, the people in your "I can't wait" video won't be waiting much longer."

"Your work, your passion, your commitment helped make the difference, and you did so in a way that protects your long-standing beliefs and the beliefs of so many others across the country. On behalf of my administration and Americans everywhere, I want to say thank you. God bless you, and God bless America."

"The tribute from Obama and Casey comes at a moment when the U.S. bishops are also meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida, and are scheduled to hold a behind-closed-doors discussion of the fallout from the health care reform debate. In a May 21 statement, the bishops called the CHA's position "a wound to Catholic unity."

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