

This past weekend the House of Representatives completed the first vote to accept a health reform bill that the Bishops of the United States and I believe is still seriously flawed.

There is no doubt some kind of reform is needed in health care. Too many vulnerable people in the United States live in fear of losing their insurance, have no or inadequate insurance and, in some cases, are unable to receive the health care they need because the cost is too great. There is waste and inequity. The Bishops of the United State have always wanted a comprehensive, just and equitable system of health care available to all, especially the most vulnerable.

But the health care reform bill passed through the House of Representatives this weekend is seriously flawed. The bill does not protect the unborn because it cannot insure federal money will not be used for abortions. In the last minutes before the vote the President swayed the pro-life democrats to vote for the Bill with the promise of an Executive Order to insure federal funds are not used to obtain an abortion. There is doubt as to whether this will have any effect or can right all of the loop holes in this bill where federal funds might be used to obtain an abortion. We (myself and the other Bishops of the United States) hoped Congress would redesign the bill in such a way as to clearly, and without doubt, eliminate federal funding for abortion with a clear amendment and strengthen the conscience clause so medical care provided in Catholic hospitals will not be affected.

Because this has not been done, we are still seriously concerned. A bill that does not protect the most vulnerable is flawed and morally wrong. This position was explained in depth by Cardinal George and has been supported by all the bishops of Louisiana:

“The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops strongly supports the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in their opposition to the current Senate health care bill. Some in the Catholic Church maintain that the Senate bill will not provide taxpayer funding for abortions and that it will uphold longstanding conscience protections. They are mistaken. It is our belief that the Senate bill fails to maintain longstanding policy against federal funding of abortion and does not include adequate conscience protections. Therefore, the bishops of Louisiana are disappointed in both the inaccurate interpretations of some within the church, as well as the confusion that this has caused. Our focus continues to be to advocate for health care reform that respects the life and dignity of all, while being both accessible and affordable. Please pray for those who represent us in Congress that they will re-examine the health care bill.”

It is my hope as this bill moves through the last processes and votes that further changes will be adopted to strengthen the protection to the unborn and to insure the conscience clause for those working in the medical profession, especially in Catholic hospitals.

*Read the statements by the USCCB and LCCB on pages 20-21 to learn more about the bishops' stance on health care reform.*