



Bishop Guglielmone's Statement on Health Care Reform

It is quite evident that there is much discussion in many quarters about the proposed health care reform bills in the houses of Congress. There are many issues that people throughout our country are concerned about, but there are some issues that are critical for us as Catholics and it is imperative that our voice be heard. I am grateful to the Conference of Catholic Bishops of our country for its competent leadership in making sure our institutional voice is heard; in particular, Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-life Activities and Bishop William Murphy, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development have eloquently, competently and forcefully made the Catholic position clear in their letters to Congress and congressional committees and their personal testimony to committees on behalf of the Conference.

However, it is not enough for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to petition the Congress. If ever there was a need for the united Catholic voice to be heard clearly and strongly, NOW is the time. After the August recess, Congress may very well act quickly on completing these bills and presenting them for a vote. Our representatives and senators need to hear our voice and we have a voice that is credible because it is a moral voice and one that has centuries of experience in health care. The bishops do not intend to propose any specific approach or plan, but any plan of health care reform must include these principles:

First of all, the Church has been involved with health care since our earliest days in this country and in very many cases, has been and still is a solitary presence for the poor and vulnerable. We Catholics believe that everyone, from conception until natural death deserves adequate health care to ensure a dignified human life.

Secondly, we oppose any effort to expand abortion funding or mandate abortion coverage. There are presently too many opportunities for this to occur in current bills. Likewise we cannot condone any inclusion of embryonic stem cell research or usage.

Thirdly, we need to see appropriate safeguards for adequately funded health care for the elderly, especially in those cases of serious or terminal illnesses. Present bills include too many possibilities for abuse of end of life issues.

In the fourth case, we believe that effective measures to safeguard the health of legal immigrants and their children must be clearly included in any health care reform.

Lastly, we absolutely oppose any attempt to remove all conscience clauses for physicians, nurses and other health care workers and any attempt to force Catholic hospitals to provide services inconsistent with our teaching. Likewise, mandating insurance coverage for employees of Catholic institutions that is not in conformity with our beliefs is not acceptable.

These are critical times for our nation and for us as Catholics. This is an issue which needs to be addressed desperately and these criteria essential for us as Catholics are NOT presently guaranteed in any versions of the legislation now under discussion. We must share our views with those who represent us since any reform will have a major impact on American society. We as Catholics have a long and consistent tradition of health care ethics and have made tremendous contributions to life in this country through the teaching of this ethical system. We must be present to this vital debate.

I ask two things of all Catholics in the Diocese of Charleston: First of all, pray and learn. Be knowledgeable and know the issues: (you might check the USCCB website www.usccb.org/healthcare on a regular basis and certainly keep up to date with competent news coverage.) Pray daily for a plan that will truly meet the needs of all people in our country. Secondly, let your voice be heard: contact your senators and representatives and let them know your thoughts; encourage friends and relatives to do likewise. Our government seems to be rushing into a plan that will not meet the needs of our citizens and a plan that will not reflect the values this nation has upheld in the past. We need time and a lot more dialog before a plan acceptable and helpful to all can be presented.

May the Lord bless our efforts.