

## Pastor's Column

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### Health Care Reform and the Catholic Bishops—An Update

*The debate on health care reform continues, and the the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is still in the middle of the debate promoting the “pro-life” stance.*

*Now that the House and Senate proposals are coming into clearer focus, a letter, dated 10/08/09, was released by the USCCB to every member of both chambers. This letter states the “priority criteria” on what a reform package would need—and, at present, doesn’t contain—before it could receive the Church’s support. The letter is signed by the USCCB’s committee chairs for pro-life activities, domestic policy, and migration.*

*Here is the text of the letter:*

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we are writing to express our disappointment that progress has not been made on the three priority criteria for health care reform that we have conveyed previously to Congress. In fact, the Senate Finance Committee rejected a conscience rights amendment accepted earlier by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. If final legislation does not meet our principles, we will have no choice but to oppose the bill. We remain committed to working with the Administration, Congressional leadership, and our allies to produce final health reform legislation that will reflect our principles.

We continue to urge you to:

- 1. Exclude mandated coverage for abortion, and incorporate longstanding policies against abortion funding and in favor of conscience rights.** No one should be required to pay for or participate in abortion. It is essential that the legislation clearly apply to this new program longstanding and widely supported federal restrictions on abortion funding and mandates, and protection for rights of conscience. No current bill meets this test.
- 2. Adopt measures that protect and improve people’s health care.** Reform should make quality health care affordable and accessible to everyone, particularly those who are vulnerable and those who live at or near the poverty level.

- 3. Include effective measures to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children, and all of society.** Ensure that legal immigrants and their family members have comprehensive, affordable, and timely access to health care coverage. Maintain an adequate safety net for those who remain uncovered.

We sincerely hope that the legislation will not fall short of our criteria. However, we remain apprehensive when amendments protecting freedom of conscience and ensuring no taxpayer money for abortion are defeated in committee votes. If acceptable language in these areas cannot be found, we will have to oppose the health care bill vigorously. Catholic moral tradition teaches that health care is a basic human right, essential to protecting human life and dignity.

Much-needed reform of our health care system must be pursued in ways that serve the life and dignity of all, never in ways that undermine or violate these fundamental values. We will work tirelessly to remedy these central problems and help pass real reform that clearly protects the life, dignity, and health of all.

Sincerely,

Cardinal Justin Rigali  
Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

Bishop William F. Murphy  
Diocese of Rockville Centre  
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice & Human Development

Bishop John Wester  
Diocese of Salt Lake City  
Chairman, Committee on Migration

