

## CATHOLICS, HEALTH CARE AND THE SENATE'S BAD BILL

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The Senate version of health-care reform currently being forced ahead by congressional leaders and the White House is a bad bill that will result in bad law. It does not deserve, nor does it have, the support of the Catholic bishops of our country. Nor does the American public want it. As I write this column on March 14, the Senate bill remains gravely flawed. It does *not* meet minimum moral standards in at least three important areas: the exclusion of abortion funding and services; adequate conscience protections for health-care professionals and institutions; and the inclusion of immigrants.

Groups, trade associations and publications describing themselves as “Catholic” or “prolife” that endorse the Senate version – whatever their intentions – are doing a serious disservice to the nation and to the Church, undermining the witness of the Catholic community; and ensuring the failure of genuine, ethical health-care reform. By their public actions, they create confusion at exactly the moment Catholics need to think clearly about the remaining issues in the health-care debate. They also provide the illusion of moral cover for an unethical piece of legislation.

As we enter a critical week in the national health-care debate, Catholics across northern Colorado need to remember a few simple facts.

First, the Catholic bishops of the United States have pressed for real national health-care reform in this country for more than half a century. They began long before either political party or the public media found it convenient. That commitment hasn't changed. Nor will it.

Second, the bishops have tried earnestly for more than seven months to work with elected officials to craft reform that would serve all Americans in a manner respecting minimum moral standards. The failure of their effort has one source. It comes *entirely* from the stubbornness and evasions of certain key congressional leaders, and the unwillingness of the White House to honor promises made by the president last September.

Third, the health-care reform debate has never been merely a matter of party politics. Nor is it now. Democratic Congressman Bart Stupak and a number of his Democratic colleagues have shown extraordinary character in pushing for good health-care reform while resisting attempts to poison it with abortion-related entitlements and other bad ideas that have nothing to do with real “health care.” Many Republicans share the goal of decent health-care reform, even if their solutions would differ dramatically. To put it another way, few persons seriously oppose making adequate health services available for all Americans. But God, or the devil, is in the details -- and by that measure, the current Senate version of health-care reform is not merely defective, but also a dangerous mistake.

The long, unpleasant and too often dishonest national health-care debate is now in its last days. Its most painful feature has been those “Catholic” groups that by their eagerness for some kind of

deal undercut the witness of the Catholic community and help advance a bad bill into a bad law. Their flawed judgment could now have damaging consequences for all of us.

Do not be misled. The Senate version of health-care reform currently being pushed ahead by congressional leaders and the White House -- despite public resistance and numerous moral concerns -- is bad law; and not simply bad, but dangerous. It does not deserve, nor does it have, the support of the Catholic bishops in our country, who speak for the believing Catholic community. In its current content, the Senate version of health-care legislation is not "reform." Catholics and other persons of good will concerned about the foundations of human dignity should oppose it.