



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brownsville

March 26, 2010

Statement by the Bishop of Brownsville, Texas on the Passage of the Health Care Reform Bill

The President of the United States has signed into law the Health Care Reform Bill passed by the United States Congress. While the law has many well intentioned and laudable aims, it is seriously flawed and will require substantive remedies to prevent it from doing great harm to individuals, and damage to the common good. As is well known, these flaws were of such a serious nature that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed passage of the legislation. A great many Catholics, in union with the position taken by the Bishops, raised their voices in opposition to the bill in the debate leading up to the vote. The Bishops of Texas, along with many people in the Rio Grande Valley, were firm in their opposition to the bill that was before Congress. I would like to thank those who heeded and defended the position taken by the bishops on this legislation.

The principal flaws in the law can be enumerated succinctly: The law makes possible the use of federal funds to pay for abortion; the law does not clearly protect the conscience rights of health care workers and institutions; the law unfairly prevents undocumented workers from purchasing health care coverage, even with their own money. Of these deficiencies, the issue of federal funding for abortion is the most grave. It is a gravely wrong for a law to allow government funds to be used to end the life of innocent, unborn children. It is also wrong for a law to infringe upon the religious freedom and consciences of health care workers; they should be explicitly protected from being forced to perform medical procedures they consider immoral. Moreover, basic respect for human dignity implies that immigrant families should not be excluded from access to basic health care.

Many of you may be discouraged by passage of the bill. To you I would say that your steadfastness in opposing the flawed legislation has not been in vain. There is hope that the President's promise to use an executive order to keep federal funds from being used to support abortion might be effective. It is not clear if such an order can deflect what is written in the law. Many legal scholars are of the view that it cannot. Whatever the case, it is clear that we must now work to remedy the flaws in the law. It is an urgent matter that we prevent any extension of government involvement in abortion-funding, that we secure strong protection of the conscience rights of health-care workers, and that immigrant families be afforded the opportunity to use their own money to access the health care available in this country.

As Catholics we are committed to promoting the goods of life for all in our country; we do not waver in our resolve to defend the most vulnerable members of our community. With the humility and conviction that only charity can engender, we do not tire in our efforts to speak for those who have little or no voice, especially unborn children. It is in this spirit that I ask the members of our Rio Grande Valley congressional delegation not to forget that this law must be remedied; I strongly urge them to work vigilantly to correct its grave faults. So long as the serious moral flaws of this law remain in force, we must not allow it to rest comfortably in our consciences.

+Daniel E. Flores

Bishop of Brownsville