

Capitol Comments: The Catholic Voice in Health Care Reform

By Andrew Rivas, Executive Director, Texas Catholic Conference

Soon after the Texas legislature adjourned in June, a local lobbyist visited us on behalf of a national organization and asked if the Texas Bishops would support the President's health care plan. We had to inform him that while the White House is currently working with the Congress there is no President Obama health care plan. We also politely, but firmly, told the lobbyist that the Bishops will definitely be involved in the national health care reform debate but would not take a partisan side.

The debate will not be easy. Health care touches every family and business, every community and parish. Health care reform represents an effort to redirect a large portion of our national economy and to reshape our society's response to a basic human need.

As the national debate unfolds, our Bishops, in seeking to outline the values, criteria, and priorities that reflect the Catholic community's strong convictions and broad experience in health care, put forward the following criteria for reform:

- *Respect for Life*. Whether it preserves and enhances the sanctity and dignity of human life from conception to natural death.
- *Priority Concern for the Poor*. Whether it gives special priority to meeting the most pressing health care needs of the poor and underserved, ensuring that they receive quality health services.
- *Universal Access*. Whether it provides ready universal access to comprehensive health care for every person living in the United States.
- *Comprehensive Benefits*. Whether it provides comprehensive benefits sufficient to maintain and promote good health; to provide preventive care; to treat disease, injury, and disability appropriately; and to care for persons who are chronically ill or dying.
- *Pluralism*. Whether it allows and encourages the involvement of the public and private sectors, including the voluntary, religious, and nonprofit sectors, in the delivery of care and services; and whether it ensures respect for religious and ethical values in the delivery of health care for consumers and for individual and institutional providers.
- *Quality*. Whether it promotes the development of processes and standards that will help to achieve quality and equity in health services, in the training of providers, and in the informed participation of consumers in decision making on health care.
- *Cost Containment and Controls*. Whether it creates effective cost-containment measures that reduce waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary care; measures that control rising costs of competition, commercialism, and administration; and measures that provide incentives to individuals and providers for effective and economical use of limited resources.
- *Equitable Financing*. Whether it assures society's obligation to finance universal access to comprehensive health care in an equitable fashion, based on ability to pay; and whether proposed cost-sharing arrangements are designed to avoid creating barriers to effective care for the poor and vulnerable. (*A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform: Protecting Human Life, Promoting Human Dignity, Pursuing the Common Good, USCCB, 1993*).

The Church calls on national leaders to look beyond special interest claims and partisan differences and unite our country in a new commitment to meet America's health care needs--a call that is at once a major political task, a significant policy challenge, and a moral imperative.

Receive updates on the Church's involvement in health care reform at www.TXcatholic.org.