

# Bishops urge Senate to change abortion provisions in health care bill

WASHINGTON - As a vote neared on a bipartisan abortion amendment to the Senate's version of health care reform legislation, three leading U.S. bishops said the proposed revision "simply corrects ... grave departures from current federal policy."

In a Dec. 7 letter to senators, the chairmen of three committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops threw their support behind an amendment to be offered that day by Sens. Ben Nelson, D-Neb.; Orrin Hatch, R-Utah; Robert Casey, D-Pa.; and five others.

The amendment would "keep in place the long-standing and widely supported federal policy against government funding of health coverage that includes elective abortions," the bishops said, and is similar to one approved by the House in November before passage of its Affordable Health Care For America Act.

"Like that amendment, it does not change the current situation in our country: Abortion is legal and available, but no federal dollars can be used to pay for elective abortions or plans that include elective abortions," the bishops said.

"This amendment does not restrict abortion, or prevent people from buying insurance covering abortion with their own funds," they added. "It simply ensures that where federal funds are involved, people are not required to pay for other people's abortions."

Along with their letter, the USCCB leaders sent each senator copies of two fact sheets - one on abortion and conscience problems in the Senate health reform bill and the other detailing what the Senate amendment would do.

The letter was signed by Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development;

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities; and Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, who heads the Committee on Migration.