

FOCA is a threat to Catholic Health Care

Following a Catholic News Service article in the Feb. 5 issue of The Catholic Review quoting Catholic Health Association representatives, there may be some confusion about whether the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) poses a threat to Catholic health care and what we should be doing to oppose it. As a physician and the president of the Catholic Medical Association, the largest association of Catholic physicians in the United States, I have some thoughts I would like to share.

No doubt, some of the confusion is due to the fact that FOCA has not been re-introduced in the current session of Congress. So, it is not clear what a new version of FOCA might include, how much support it would have, and how soon it might be voted on. Despite this uncertainty, I think that all Catholics, especially Catholic physicians and health care providers, must begin immediately to address the threats to human life and conscience that are swiftly approaching.

As introduced in 2007 by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Ca.), FOCA was intended to override every law that might limit or interfere with a woman's "right" to kill her unborn child. In the Catholic Medical Association's analysis of this legislation and in the opinion of other respected legal analysts, including the general counsel of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, this version of FOCA would have overturned every law limiting abortion passed during the last three decades, including laws that protect the rights of physicians, health care providers and hospitals to refuse to participate in abortion. In 2007, then Senator Barack Obama expressed his wholehearted support for FOCA and in 2008, promised to sign FOCA into law.

Now there are rumors that supporters of FOCA are going to divide FOCA into several parts and insert these parts into various bills. We must be vigilant in opposing these efforts.

Even apart from FOCA, however, innocent human life is more threatened than ever, and Catholic health care providers and institutions are facing increasing threats to their religious freedom. One of President Obama's first acts was to overturn the

“Mexico City policy,” sending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to agencies that perform and promote abortion overseas. Even more ominously, President Obama has indicated his desire to provide taxpayer dollars to the United Nations Population Fund, an organization that lost federal funding after it collaborated with the Chinese government’s coercive “one child” population policy. President Obama has guaranteed that he will provide federal funding for human embryonic stem cell research. Finally, President Obama has declared his opposition to the new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services rule that protects the conscience rights of health care providers. The rule was enacted by Secretary Michael Leavitt in the last days of the Bush administration, in response to multiple threats to conscience rights. For example, in 2007, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) issued an ethics policy demanding that all OB/GYNs refer for abortion and perform abortions when “referral is not possible and might adversely affect a patient’s . . . mental health.” Pharmacists and health care providers in several states have also found their rights to conscience and religious freedom under attack.

Because of these developments, Catholic physicians, health care providers and hospitals are now being called not only to provide compassionate care to patients, but to be on the front lines of defending the Culture of Life. I ask you to join with us in fighting to protect human life and our religious freedom to serve human life and health with integrity.

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