

FOCA ...

The election last week of Senator Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States was, indeed, a historic day for our nation. His election as the first African-American to hold the office of president is a significant step forward for a country that continues to heal from the wounds inflicted by the sin of racism. And the response I have witnessed in the past week clearly indicates how meaningful this historic moment is for so many people - most especially our sisters and brothers in the African-American community.

Now that the extended and divisive campaign is over, we rejoice that the president-elect has accepted the challenge of unifying a country divided not in its desire for a better America, but in its belief in what will truly make America better. While early exit polling indicated that the economy was the paramount concern of six out of every 10 Americans, we must not lose sight of the ongoing struggle our country faces in achieving genuine respect for the freedom and dignity of every human life.

On the day after the election, the nation's Catholic bishops issued a statement congratulating the president-elect and urging him to defend the weak and heal divisions.

"Our country is confronting many uncertainties," we bishops said. "We pray that you will use the powers of your office to meet them with a special concern to defend the most vulnerable among us and heal the divisions in our country and our world. We stand ready to work with you in defense and support of the life and dignity of every human person."

As faithful citizens, our duty to remain actively engaged in the political process does not end at the voting booth. It is equally important that we continue to claim our legitimate role in the public square by urging those whom we have elected as our leaders to uphold values we believe are fundamental to the common good. We pray there will be many issues upon which we can work in wholehearted unity with our country's new administration and members of Congress. But today I urge all Catholics - those who voted for our president-elect and those who did not - to respond to President-elect Obama's promise in his November 4 acceptance speech:

“I will listen to you, especially when we disagree.”

Of particular concern to Catholics and others seeking to promote a culture of life, is Senator Obama’s public commitment to passing the Freedom of Choice Act. It is critically important that we voice our early and grave concerns to our elected officials regarding this uncompromising legislation, which is currently pending before Congress. To do so, and to learn more information, I encourage you to visit the online Legislative Action Center of our Maryland Catholic Conference at www.mdcathcon.org.

The Freedom of Choice Act, or FOCA, eliminates even the most modest regulations on abortion and creates a “fundamental right” to abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy. Despite its misleading title claiming freedom of choice, FOCA, co-sponsored by Maryland Senators Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin and Representatives Dutch Ruppersberger and Chris Van Hollen ...

- Removes the choice of medical providers to refuse in good conscience to provide morally offensive services.
- Removes the choice of taxpayers to decline to have their money pay for morally abhorrent procedures.
- Removes the choice of state legislatures to undertake reasonable and widely accepted regulations of abortions, including those that increase education and family involvement while reducing the number of abortions.

Not only does FOCA eliminate legitimate conscientious choice, it actually expands the scope of laws to enhance abortion on demand by ...

- Making abortion a “fundamental” right: Thus, policies now in place by the will of the people and legislatures in many states would be overridden across the nation (e.g. informed consent, parental notification and restrictions on government funding of abortions).
- Requiring an expansion of government-assisted abortions through military and public hospitals.

- Requiring greater taxpayer subsidy of abortions.

A threat to all life, this legislation would also have a terrible impact on Catholic and other pro-life health care providers. Of particular note:

- FOCA trumps state laws that protect rights of providers (e.g. Catholic hospitals, pharmacists, etc.) to conscientiously object to performing abortions if such state laws are seen to “interfere” in any way with a woman’s decision to have an abortion.
- FOCA undermines the freedom of religion upon which our country was founded.

I pledge that we will join with all law-abiding religious and public interest groups in taking every action necessary to resist this blatant attempt to stifle the consciences of those who continue to hold innocent human life sacred.

In his 1919 Pastoral Letter, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore wrote: “In a special degree, the sense and performance of duty is required of those who are entrusted with public office. They are at once the servants of the people and the bearers of an authority whose original source is none other than God.”

I ask the faithful of this Archdiocese to pray for our president-elect and for all newly elected leaders – that they will perform the duties entrusted to them with respect for the dignity of all human life and in complete faithfulness to the God we are all called to serve.