

Pro-Obama Catholics urged to send postcard opposing his abortion view

WASHINGTON - The national pro-life postcard campaign being conducted in parishes throughout the country is a way for Catholics who supported Barack Obama for president to tell him if they did so despite, not because of, the new president's stand on abortion, according to officials of the U.S. bishops' pro-life office.

"Many Catholics voted for Obama despite his position on abortion, and they have an obligation to say 'This is not why I voted for you,'" said Richard M. Doerflinger, associate director of the Office of Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"I describe this as their penance," he added in remarks at a Jan. 22 briefing with the Catholic press in Washington.

The campaign will be conducted in the Archdiocese of Baltimore at Masses on Jan. 24 and 25.

Deirdre A. McQuade, assistant director for policy and communications in the pro-life office, said it is important for Catholics to tell President Obama, "If I voted for you, this (abortion) is not what I voted for."

Such follow-up and feedback is an "ongoing responsibility" of all voters, she added. "You don't just cast your vote and hope for the best. You call the best from our elected officials."

According to polling, 54 percent of the Catholic electorate voted for President Obama, who has consistently spoken out in favor of keeping abortion legal.

On Jan. 22, the 36th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, Obama reiterated his position that he is committed to protecting women's "right to choose" and called for both sides to work toward common ground to find ways to reduce the number of abortions.

The postcard campaign, coordinated by the USCCB pro-life office and the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, began in mid-January and was expected to continue for three or four weeks. It asks members of Congress to oppose the proposed Freedom of Choice Act “or any similar measure, and retain laws against federal funding and promotion of abortion.”

“At this time of serious national challenges, Americans should unite to serve the good of all, born and unborn,” the postcards say.

The Freedom of Choice Act, which as of Jan. 23 had not been introduced in the 111th Congress, would put into place “the most extreme abortion license that we could possibly have,” said Philadelphia Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, at the briefing.

At weekend Masses around the country, Catholics are being asked to sign and mail postcards to each of their two U.S. senators and to their representative. The cost of postage is being handled in different ways in different places; some parishes or Knights of Columbus councils are subsidizing the cost, while others are asking parishioners to pay for the postage themselves.

Millions of sets of the three postcards have already been ordered, and orders were continuing to come in, according to the pro-life officials.

“The idea is to have a real presence in congressional mailboxes early in the session,” Ms. McQuade said.

Congress was expected to take up various appropriations bills in the weeks ahead. Those measures could delete or alter the Hyde amendment and other riders prohibiting federal funding of abortion; eliminate conscience clauses protecting health care providers’ rights not to participate in abortions and allowing Catholic health plans to participate in the federal employees’ health benefits program without having to provide contraceptives; or end funding of abstinence-only education programs.

According to a handout at the briefing, other proposals that could come before this Congress include FOCA, which would revoke most pro-life laws at the state and

federal level; a contraceptive mandate for all private health plans; a requirement that all hospitals receiving federal funds offer “emergency contraception” to all rape victims; and expanded funding for domestic and foreign family planning programs.

President Obama also was expected to sign executive orders overturning the Mexico City policy barring federal funds to organizations that promote or perform abortions overseas; expand funding of stem-cell research involving the destruction of human embryos; and limit conscience protections in health care.

At a separate briefing Jan. 22 at the National Press Club, the president of the National Right to Life Committee said that under the Obama administration “we can expect a radical agenda” that will cause the number of abortions “to increase dramatically.”

“The stakes have never been higher, but our resolve and determination to protect unborn children and help their mothers has never been stronger,” said Wanda Franz.

David N. O’Steen, NRLC executive director, urged the new Congress not to “mistake the good fortune of Democrats, who were in the right place when voters blamed the economic turmoil on the party in the White House, with a vote in favor of abortion.”