

U.S. House passes Protect Life Act in bipartisan vote

WASHINGTON - The U.S. House Oct. 13 passed the Protect Life Act, which applies long-standing federal policies on abortion funding and conscience rights to the health reform law.

The measure passed with a bipartisan vote of 251 to 172. Its chief sponsors were Rep. Joe Pitts, R-Pa., chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Ill., who co-chairs the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus. The bill also had 144 co-sponsors.

"The health care law made it clear that the current way we prevent taxpayer funding of abortion through annual riders is dangerously fragile," Lipinski said in January when the measure was introduced. "We must take action to prevent federal funding for abortion under the health care law and throughout the government, without exception."

In a statement released Oct. 14, Deirdre McQuade, spokeswoman for the U.S. bishop's pro-life secretariat, said that by passing H.R. 358, "the House has taken an important step toward authentic health care reform that respects the dignity of all, from conception onward."

McQuade urged the Senate to likewise "help make health care reform life-affirming."

The Protect Life Act applies the Hyde amendment to health care reform "so federal funds will not be used to subsidize elective abortions," McQuade said, which brings the law "into line with other federal health programs such as Medicaid and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program."

It also "helps ensure that the government will not pressure health professionals to participate in abortion against their medical judgment, moral convictions or religious beliefs," she added.

In an Oct. 12 letter to Congress, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, repeated his call to lawmakers to vote for the Protect Life Act. "Please help give us a reformed health care system that respects the life, health and conscience of all," the cardinal wrote.