

USCCB efforts on health care reform measure seen as lesson for future

The successful effort by leaders and staff members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to press lawmakers to keep abortion out of health care reform legislation in the House of Representatives provides an example for the future, according to the chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

“It was a good example of how we as a conference can work together to have a positive influence on legislation,” said Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., in a Nov. 16 report to his fellow bishops.

The fact that House members knew the bishops wanted to see health reform succeed as long as it was abortion-neutral “allowed us to be heard in a number of different areas,” the bishop added.

Bishop Murphy made the comments at the USCCB fall general assembly in Baltimore after the full body of bishops gave its endorsement to an earlier statement by Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago after House passage Nov. 7 of the Affordable Health Care for America Act.

Cardinal George, USCCB president, asked his fellow bishops in Baltimore to give greater weight to the statement by indicating their support. They did so with applause, with no visible signs of opposition.

In that statement, the cardinal said House members who voted for health reform “honored President (Barack) Obama’s commitment to the Congress and the nation that health care reform would not become a vehicle for expanding abortion funding or mandates.”

He pledged that the USCCB would “remain vigilant and involved throughout this entire process to assure that these essential provisions are maintained and included

in the final legislation.”

“We will work to persuade the Senate to follow the example of the House and include these critical safeguards in their version of health care reform legislation,” he added.

Cardinal George thanked House members “who took this courageous and principled step to oppose measures that would force Americans to pay for the destruction of unborn children, and the Democratic leadership for allowing the representatives to vote on this amendment that protects the common good.”

In addition to his comments on the abortion issue, the cardinal cited other areas of concern in health reform legislation.

“We will continue to insist that health care reform legislation must protect conscience rights,” he said. “We support measures to make health care more affordable for low-income people and the uninsured. We remain deeply concerned that immigrants be treated fairly and not lose health care coverage that they now have.”

As the Senate debate on health reform continues, the USCCB will be working to guarantee that the final bill will be able to “pass moral muster,” Cardinal George said.