

September 13, 2009

As the legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), my advice would be: Watch what they do -- it is more important than what they say. For months, the President, his staff, and his congressional allies have been saying all sorts of misleading things about the abortion-related implications of different legislative proposals. Their disinformation campaign is now unraveling, but it is by no means clear that they have really decided to come clean.

The biggest abortion-related concerns with H.R. 3200 pertain to (1) a proposed insurance program that would be run entirely by the federal government (the "public option"); and (2) a proposed new premium-subsidy program ("affordability credits") to help tens of millions of people buy health insurance. For many weeks, the White House -- including the President himself -- has made statements indicating either that the traditional Hyde Amendment would prevent the new programs from funding abortion, or that language adopted in a House committee (the Capps-Waxman Amendment), over the objections of pro-life members, would ensure that only "private" funds are used to pay for abortions. Each claim collapses under scrutiny. In fact, the bills approved by the House and Senate committees would put the federal government into the business of funding abortions directly, and also in the business of subsidizing the purchase of private health policies that cover elective abortions -- and all with federal funds, which are the only kind of funds that the federal government can spend.

Unfortunately, everything we have seen so far would suggest that President Obama's latest so-called "pledge" not to provide "federal funds" for abortion, articulated in the joint session speech on September 9, was just the latest in a series of highly misleading statements on the subject -- statements that employ a distorted and contrived terminology, or that rely on misdirection and evasion.

H.R. 3200, as amended by the Capps-Waxman Amendment, explicitly authorizes the Administration to cover elective abortions in the public fund. Congressional Democratic leaders (Reid, Pelosi, et al) claim that the abortions will be paid for by "private funds." The claim that a federal agency would be spending private funds on abortion, not federal funds, is absurd on its face -- a political hoax.

The funds in a citizen's bank account are "private," but once he or she writes a check to the IRS to pay income taxes, the funds become federal government funds, public funds, deposited in a U.S. Treasury account. The same would be true of the money collected by the Department of Health and Human Services to run the public fund. Once an enrollee made a "premium" payment to DHHS, the funds would no longer be "private" -- they would be federal government funds, as truly and completely as the funds that are collected by the IRS.

It is really pretty simple: Abortionists would send their bills to the DHHS, and they would receive payments drawn on the U.S. Treasury. This would be direct federal government funding of elective abortion, using federal funds (which are, in reality, the only kind of funds that the government can spend). It would be impossible to enroll in the public fund without paying a premium that was increased specifically to cover the cost of elective abortions.

A September 8 NRLC media advisory that summarizes these issues is posted here:

<http://www.nrlc.org/AHC/Advisory090809.html>

While running for president, Barack Obama promised Planned Parenthood that "reproductive services" (which includes abortion) would be "at the heart" of his health plan, and that his public plan would cover them. H.R. 3200 contains the fulfillment of that commitment, which Mr. Obama now seeks to smuggle into law behind a smokescreen of misleading rhetoric. See Politifact:

<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2009/sep/11/john-boehner/boehner-says-abortion-access-was-always-key-goal-o/>

Douglas Johnson

Legislative Director

National Right to Life Committee

Washington, D.C.

<http://www.nrlc.org>

legfederal--at--aol,dot,com