



A Catholic Message for Congress:

Bringing Hope to a Broken World

February 29, 2009

Catholic leaders from across the country come to Capitol Hill to offer hope at a time of fear; to safeguard human life and dignity at a time of economic crisis and continuing war. Our message reflects old values in new times...

- Put the needs of poor and vulnerable people first in our public priorities.
- Health care should safeguard the lives of all.
- Those who contribute least to climate change should not suffer the most.
- Overcoming poverty and despair is an investment in a better, safer world.
- Engagement, not isolation, is the best way to open up closed societies.

At a time of economic crisis brought about by irresponsible action, we call for new responsibility and solidarity. We support budget, tax and economic policies that assist and protect “the least among us,” which are not only morally right, but also economically effective. We know from the everyday experience of Catholic parishes, Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and Catholic Relief Services the moral and human costs of economic crisis, the lack of health care, shortsighted international policies and global hunger, disease, and environmental neglect.

In addition to the specific issues addressed below, we also call for a constructive national discussion of the realities and causes of migration that rejects stereotypes and simplistic answers. Congress has a moral obligation to fix this broken system through comprehensive immigration reform that insists God-given human dignity does not depend on where you come from or when you got here. Beyond our shores, we support: addressing global poverty and the other causes of migration; assisting and protecting refugees, human trafficking victims, and other forced migrants; asserting U.S. leadership for a just two-state peace for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and engaging in “responsible transition” to end the war in Iraq.

At the center of our protection of human life and dignity, we are working to end the destruction of unborn children, the most vulnerable in our midst. We support measures to protect unborn children and to help families choose viable alternatives to abortion through improved services and help for women and children. We strongly oppose measures like the “Freedom of Choice Act” and efforts to overturn longstanding pro-life protections and compel people to pay for or participate in abortion.

In a spirit of “faithful citizenship,” we come to Capitol Hill to urge action on four specific issues:

Health Care that Protects the Lives and Dignity of All

Catholic teaching insists health care is a fundamental human right, an essential protection for human life and dignity. All people should have access to comprehensive, quality and affordable health care. Health care should not depend on their stage of life, where or whether they work, how much they earn, where they live, or where they were born. We urge Congress to SUPPORT health care reform that:

1. brings about truly universal health policy with respect for human life and dignity;
2. assures access for all with a special concern for the poor;
3. pursues the common good and preserves pluralism, including freedom of conscience and a variety of health care options; and
4. restrains costs and applies them equitably across the spectrum of payers.





Association of Catholic
Colleges and Universities



Society of
St. Vincent de Paul



National Catholic Rural Life Conference

We SUPPORT legislation to assure decent health care for all because it is a basic right, and we OPPOSE including abortion funding because it is wrong to compel people to pay for abortion and will doom needed health reform:

1. SUPPORT measures like the “Pregnant Women Support Act” (S. 270 and H.R. 605).
2. OPPOSE abandoning long-standing prohibitions on federal funding of abortion.
3. SUPPORT essential conscience protections so that people or institutions are not compelled to participate in abortion or other procedures that fundamentally violate their religious and moral convictions.

Putting the Poor First in Climate Change Legislation

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have called for action to address climate change in order to care for the gift of God’s creation. We insist on protection for the poor and vulnerable who are most likely to suffer the worst consequences of climate change although they contribute the least to the problem and have the fewest resources to respond. We SUPPORT a clear priority for the poor and vulnerable in necessary climate change legislation and adequate funding to:

1. ensure that low-income individuals and working families are protected from energy-related price increases, including utility, transportation and other associated costs and economic burdens resulting from climate change policies;
2. create decent “green” jobs targeted to those most in need and assist workers who lose jobs as a result of climate policies;
3. assist the poorest developing nations and vulnerable communities in the U.S in adapting to climate change impacts, reducing the human and economic costs of climate change, and developing sustainable low-carbon economies. Adaptation and mitigation funding would be in addition to other overseas relief and development commitments.

Increase and Reform International Aid

Foreign aid is an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, reduce poverty, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance national and global security. U.S. foreign aid has improved the lives of many, but greater effectiveness and focus are needed.

1. ***Increase International Assistance*** funding for poverty-focused programs by \$3 billion as a down payment on the Administration’s commitment to double foreign assistance: the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR); development and humanitarian assistance and emergency programs; Title II Food Aid Program; the Millennium Challenge Account; debt relief; and peacekeeping programs.
2. ***Reform International Assistance*** to make human development and poverty alleviation the fundamental goals of foreign assistance, and formulate a coherent strategy that integrates development assistance, trade, agriculture, climate change and other policies to promote human development and reduce poverty. For more information, see *Catholics Confront Global Poverty* at www.usccb.org/globalpoverty.

Freedom to Travel to Cuba

Improving human rights, the living conditions of the Cuban people and encouraging the future democratization of Cuban governance can best be accomplished through more, rather than less, contact with the American people. More engagement will undermine the excuses put forward by the Cuban government for its failures and will increase pressures for change. We urge Congress and the Administration to support bipartisan legislation (H.R. 874 and S. 428) to end restrictions on U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba. If passed, this legislation would support exchanges between the American and Cuban peoples and would communicate a new spirit of engagement in U.S. foreign policy with Latin America and the rest of the world. For more information, visit www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/cuba.shtml.



The Conference
of Major Superiors of Men



Catholic Daughters
of the Americas



Ladies of Charity