

Conservative Christians Unconvinced by Obama Health Care Speech

✖ Conservative Christian leaders remained unconvinced that President Obama's health reform plan will not include abortion or mark a government takeover of health care.

In his speech Wednesday night before Congress, President Obama renewed his calls to revamp the nation's health care system to ensure that all Americans are covered. He also insisted the proposed reform plan would not fund abortion, create death panels to decide whether the elderly lived or died, insure illegal immigrants or constitute a government takeover of health care.

Several conservative Christian leaders, however, said the president was being disingenuous, arguing that the Capps Amendments, passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee passed, allows abortion coverage in the public health plan.

"It's surprising the president continues to claim that 'no federal dollars' will fund abortion particularly after this assertion was widely disputed weeks ago," said Family Research Council President Tony Perkins. "It's also very clear that the President's call for a 'new insurance exchange' will be the vehicle for taxpayer funded abortion."

The leaders continue to call on lawmakers to include explicit language in the bill to exclude abortion from any health reform plan, though that move alone would not likely secure their support for the health bill.

In a statement released Thursday, leaders of the Freedom Federation-a diverse coalition of more than 30 Christian organizations that reportedly represents 30 million constituents-said they support health care reform, but oppose any plan that allows the government to run health care, funds abortion, ration care or limits individual freedom.

"We believe social justice includes healthcare reform that lowers the cost, increases quality and expands choice at the greatest convenience without moving private health decisions from the doctor's office to Washington bureaucrats," the federation stated. "Individual liberties trump government-imposed obligations. We believe that individuals, communities, and doctors in the free market make better health decisions than government mandates. We believe in incentives, not coercion."

Recently, 1.2 million people signed a petition opposing the health reform plan that was delivered to lawmakers on Wednesday. Tens of thousands previously sent letters to members of Congress expressing their concerns about the bill's ambiguity on abortion.

But the issue continues to divide Christians, as many see supporting legislation that would provide health care to all Americans as part of the Bible's mandate to care for the poor.

"Our health care crisis is, above all, a moral failure," said the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. "Reform should be neither a partisan cause nor a political contest, but a necessity of service to the common good of our society. I trust that our politicians now can act as the leaders they were elected to be."

Leaders from the Federation and other conservative Christian groups were to respond to the president's address with a town hall meeting broadcast online Thursday night.

Co-sponsored by the American Family Association (AFA) and FRC, the Webcast features such speakers as Perkins, Liberty Counsel founder Mathew Staver, who is also a leader in the Freedom Federation, and Bishop Harry Jackson, pastor of Hope Christian Church in Maryland and a Federation member.

The faith leaders were to be joined by Republican Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina; House Republican Leader John Boehner and Republican Rep. Charles Boustany of Louisiana and Republican Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey.

The AFA reports that 76,000 people participated in its previous Webcast on health care reform. Thursday night's Webcast can be viewed at the FRC Action Web site.