

# 'Freedom Federation' Says Health Bill Must Protect Life

✖ A federation of some of the nation's largest Christian organizations, including several Pentecostal-charismatic groups, weighed in on the health care debate today during a press conference in Washington, D.C.

Members of the Freedom Federation, a multiethnic, intergenerational consortium of faith-based groups, sought to build consensus with those who believe health reform is needed to make medical care accessible to all Americans.

But they promised to oppose any bill that does not protect human life by excluding abortion from government-funded health coverage and opposing a single-payer health system, which they believe will lead to a rationing of care.

"Government must protect human life," said Mathew D. Staver (pictured), founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of the Liberty University School of Law. "Life, no matter how young, is not expendable, and no matter how ill or aged is not to be weighed in a cost-benefit scale. Any health care policy that destroys our freedom and does not protect human life is unacceptable. This is a debate we must engage in, but those are fundamental core values that we cannot compromise on."

President Obama has repeatedly denied that his proposed health reform plan will cover abortion or lead to death panels that would decide whether the elderly and chronically ill live or die. In a conference call with faith leaders last week, he said many of his opponents were "bearing false witness" by repeating such claims.

But federation members say the president is misleading the public. They argue that amendments to explicitly exclude abortion coverage from the bill failed to pass, while the Capps Amendment, which they say allows abortion coverage, was approved.

"The one way to put this to rest is to explicitly put that prohibition in any legislation that is written. That is a simple step," said Ken Blackwell, former Ohio Secretary of State and currently a senior fellow for family empowerment for the Family Research Council.

Federation members also say a rationing of health care would be inevitable under a government-run system.

Although the Obama administration and Congress likely have good intentions, "inexorably interests of the state are always going to be exerted over the individual over time," said Rick Tyler, founding director of Renewing American Leadership (REAL).

"That may not happen in this administration but if you set up the structures that create a national health care system, over time decisions get made that move health care decisions away from individuals and their loved ones and doctors to bureaucrats in Washington to decide how taxpayer money is going to be used," he said.

The federation, which launched in June, is comprised of 30 organizations that have signed a Declaration of American Values that affirms the sanctity of life, support for traditional marriage and limited government, among other issues.

Member organizations include Concerned Women for America, the Family Research Council, Teen Mania, MorningStar Ministries, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and the Church of God in Christ.

In recent months, a cross-section of Christian leaders has come out in support of the president's health plan, arguing that churchgoers have a moral obligation to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable health care.

But federation members say there are more effective ways to help the poor.

"The issue is not whether we agree on helping poor people or not, the issue is how to help," said Bishop Harry Jackson, chairman of the High Impact Leadership Coalition. "The reality is, the solutions that have been presented don't offer a moral and a practical way of dealing with those problems."

Federation members argue that lawmakers could improve health care by making insurance coverage portable so it's not linked to one state or a particular job, providing dollar-for-dollar tax deductions for the cost of health care premiums or payments, or allowing a similar dollar-for-dollar tax deduction for contributions to faith-based and nonprofit groups that provide low-cost or free health care.

During the press conference, the federation announced the launch of , which they said will educate Americans on the health bill and advocate against any measure that does not exclude abortion coverage.

Members will also participate in a national health care webcast on Sept. 10 hosted by the Family Research Council.

"The federation is about mobilizing voices to engage in this dialogue, voices that are too frequently are not heard in the corridors of power in Washington, D.C.," Blackwell said.

"We believe that when the legislators ... come back to Washington after the summer break that there will be a push to put this on a fast track," he added. "We will be a stop sign and say, 'Let's apply reason and thought and broaden participation.'"