

Christian Groups Make Last-Ditch Health Care Lobbying Push

✖ Opponents of President Obama's health reform plan are putting forth a last-ditch effort to derail the proposal Congress has been urged to pass through an expedited reconciliation process this month.

The Family Research Council (FRC) on Tuesday issued an urgent call for its supporters to sign a petition calling on representatives in the House to oppose what the group calls a "government takeover of health care." Focus on the Family Action launched a lobbying campaign over health care reform Wednesday.

"[The House of Representatives] is getting set to vote on the monstrosity that was voted out of the Senate that includes taxpayer-funded bribes to different senators and allows for the largest expansion of government funding of abortions we have ever seen," FRC President Tony Perkins said in an e-mail to supporters.

Under the proposed reconciliation process, the House would have to approve the Senate-passed bill before it could vote on a second measure that includes compromises on areas of disagreement. The Senate could pass the revised legislation with 51 votes instead of the 60 usually required for major legislation. The White House has given Congress until March 18 to complete the process.

"We will deliver the petitions to pro-life Democrats and the Republican leadership to remind them to stand firm for the principles we all believe in," Perkins continued. "The only pro-life vote is NO to the current health care legislation soon to be up in the House of Representatives."

FRC said it has gathered 160,000 signatures so far.

Other groupsâ€”from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention to the American Family Association and Traditional Values Coalitionâ€”also are asking their supporters to lobby their representatives to oppose the bill.

Several conservative Christian groups say the bill would give the government too much power over health care and create a heavy national debt for future generations.

But the abortion debate remains at the center of opponents' appeals. Last week, Rep. Bart Stupak of Michigan, who introduced language for the House bill that strictly prohibits federal funding for abortion, said he and 11 other pro-life Democrats would vote against the bill if stricter abortion language is not included.Â

"If you go to page 2,069 through page 2,078, you would find in there the federal government would directly subsidize abortions," Stupak told *Good Morning America* last week. "We're not going to vote for this bill with that kind of language in there."

Some observers, however, say that like the House bill, the Senate measure does not fund abortion beyond the scope of the Hyde amendment, which prohibits federal abortion funding except in the cases of rape, incest or threat to the mother's life.

The Senate abortion language, written by Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., allows government-subsidized health plans to cover abortion with private funds collected from policyholders. In order to get the coverage, people would have to write two checks to their health insurance plan, and the money would be kept in a separate account from taxpayer funds.

Timothy Jost, a law professor at Washington and Lee University

and co-author of the casebook *Health Law*, which is widely used in teaching health law, said the difference between the two bills is an administrative technicality.

“What Stupak says is you have to buy a separate policy, and what Nelson says is you have to write two checks,” Jost said, according to the Associated Press. “There’s no public funding of abortion.”

But Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, told the AP the distinction between taxpayer funds and private premiums is a fig leaf.

“The Senate bill departs from long-standing federal policy by authorizing tax subsidies to help tens of millions of Americans buy private health plans that could cover abortion on demand,” Johnson told the AP. “Anyone enrolling in such plan would be required to make separate payments into an abortion fund.”

Last week, pro-life advocate Lou Engle issued a call for Christians to fast and pray that the proposed health reform plan would be derailed. Engle, founder of TheCall prayer movement, said he had a dream in December in which he believes God told him the health bill could not be killed “with man-made weapons.”

“The bill could be killed in the House, but only if the body of Christ will respond with urgent prayer,” Engle said.Â

This week, Obama has issued sharp criticism of health insurance rate hikes as part of what some observers see as an effort to generate more popular support for health care overhaul.

“Part of the motivating factor here is letting members of Congress know there’s a price to pay for failure,” White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel told the *Washington Post* Monday. “And for the public, it’s important to remind them that there

are premium increases of 40 percent for as far as you can see if nothing is done.”

Meanwhile, a broad coalition of faith groups sent a letter to Obama and Congress last month urging them to pass a comprehensive health care bill.

The 58 national and 80 local groups, representing Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, evangelical and mainline Protestant organizations, said no reform bill will be perfect but “turning back now could mean justice delayed for another generation and an unprecedented opportunity lost.”

Signatories included: Ronald Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action; the Rev. T. DeWitt Smith, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; Bishop Carolyn Tyler Guidry, president of Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Jim Wallis, president of Sojourners.