

COGIC Endorses Health Reform Bill

✖ The nation's largest Pentecostal denomination announced its support for President Obama's health reform plan and called on the faith community to "set a moral example" by supporting the president's efforts to address the issue.

In a statement released Thursday, Church of God in Christ (COGIC) Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake Sr. said his 6 million-member denomination supports health insurance reform that provides universal coverage, is portable and places limits on the exclusion of coverage for pre-existing conditions.

He also said his organization opposes abortion coverage in the proposed health plan. "In accord with our commitment to Christian teaching, we wholeheartedly affirm the president's position that medical costs related to the abortion of fetuses shall not be covered by health care plans funded by this initiative," Blake stated.

Arguing that COGIC has a mandate to preach the gospel and advocate for justice and compassion, Blake said a public nonprofit option is "essential" toward bringing greater accountability among insurance companies, doctors, hospitals and other health providers.

"We endorse the requirement that all individuals carry basic health insurance, provided that the government recognizes hardship waivers where necessary and provides sliding-scale tax credits for the needy," Blake stated. "We are convinced of the need for immediate low-cost coverage for those with pre-existing conditions. Furthermore it is our position that businesses that do not provide coverage for their workers should help bear the cost of these workers' health insurance,

though we recognize the need for special allowances for small business owners.”

The denomination’s support for a public health care option puts it at odds with the newly formed Freedom Federation, which lists COGIC among its members. In a statement released in early September, the federation said it supports affordable health care but objects to a plan that includes abortion coverage or a public option. COGIC was not included among the signers of that statement.

“We certainly don’t support a government-run system,” said Mathew Staver, whose Liberty Counsel was a founding member of the federation. “We support a free-enterprise system. I think [a government-run system] will ... infringe on individual liberty.”

Although President Obama has said the health care plan would not include abortion coverage, Staver said the federation remains doubtful.

“I know President Barack Obama promised that he would not fund abortion,” Staver said. “That’s hard to imagine considering his track record. But we would hold him at that word, and I think collectively that’s where the strongest unity is among organizations.”

Despite the federation’s concerns about the current health reform plan, Staver said he believes his group and COGIC have the same goal. “We don’t want to have any support for abortion or anything that would cheapen human life or look at human life from a cost-benefit analysis,” he said. “But one of the things we said is that we believe social justice includes health reform that lowers the cost, increases the quality and expands choice at the greatest convenience without moving private health care decision from the doctor’s office to Washington bureaucrats.”

In his statement, Blake called on other African-American

denominations, as well as leaders of other major denominations and faith groups, to “set a moral example which moves our country beyond the noise of racial division and partisanship by supporting President Obama’s courageous initiative to address this vital issue.”

“People of faith all over this country have a responsibility to stand for the millions who suffer from a lack of adequate health insurance by pleading the cause of the needy, and raising their voices in support of the president’s health care reform agenda,” he added.

On Monday, however, a group of pro-life black pastors issued a statement saying they were “outraged” by COGIC’s support for the health reform plan. The ministers—including Walter B. Hoya of the Issues4Life Foundation, who was jailed earlier this year for his pro-life activism, and LEARN Inc. founder Johnny Hunter—said despite Obama’s claims, abortion would be allowed in the health reform plan through the Capps-Waxman Amendment.

“We recommend in the strongest terms possible that this endorsement be withdrawn until such time that the Obama administration adds language to the health care proposal that specifically prohibits taxpayer-funded abortions,” the ministers stated.

In an editorial at Huffington earlier this month, Rep. Lois Capps, D-Calif., disputed claims that her amendment would allow abortion coverage in the health reform bill.

“Some people have gone so far as to claim my amendment would mandate abortion coverage in all insurance plans,” she wrote. “This is simply untrue. My amendment specifically prohibits abortion from being included as part of the essential benefits package.”

She said the measure upholds the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal Medicaid funds for abortion except in cases of rape, incest or when the mother’s life is

at risk.

Pro-life advocates, however, say the amendment is a phony compromise that would allow federal funding to go to private insurance plans that cover abortion.

“This Amendment would create a radical departure from existing law, in that the government would subsidize health insurance plans that pay for abortion,” wrote Mary Harned in a position statement for Americans United for Life. “It is critically important that the health care reform bills before Congress include explicit language that truly prohibits abortion funding and coverage, and includes comprehensive conscience protection.”

An analysis of the Capps Amendment at the nonpartisan also says the current House bill would permit both a public health plan and newly subsidized private plans to cover all abortions.