

Health Bill Angers, Delights Pro-Life Christians

✖ Michigan Rep. Bart Stupak, who led pro-life Democrats in opposing the health care overhaul, has been labeled alternately a hero and a traitor by abortion opponents since he announced his support for the health reform bill after reaching a last-minute deal with the White House.

Just hours before the House passed health reform legislation Sunday in a history-making 219-212 vote, President Obama agreed to issue an executive order that would prohibit federal funding for elective abortions in accordance with the Hyde Amendment, which allows abortion funding in the cases of rape, incest or threat to the mother's health. The order also would separate federal subsidies from private money in health plans that cover abortions and clarify that the new health care laws would protect hospitals, doctors and other providers that object to providing abortions as a matter of conscience.

Stupak said because of the agreement, "there will be no public funding for abortion in this legislation." After the deal was announced, pro-life Democrat Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio said the health bill was "actually a bill about life," National Public Radio reported.

"No longer will any woman have to wonder whether she can bring a child to term because she can't afford it," Kaptur said. "The provisions in this bill that have to do with maternal health care, child health care, preventive care, the adoption credits that were included in the bill take us to a new day in America."

But Republican lawmakers and conservative pro-life advocates say the executive order is not enough to prevent public funding for abortion in the health care bill. They argue that

it does not have the force of law that legislation would provide and can easily be revoked.

“There is no way that an executive order will protect the unborn or prevent the greatest expansion of elective abortion since Roe v. Wade,” Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said in a statement. “Pro-life lawmakers would be making a serious mistake to trust those who have repeatedly attempted to mislead the American people into believing that abortion is not in the bill.”

House Minority Leader John Boehner said in a statement Sunday that an executive order “can direct members of the executive branch, it cannot direct the private sector.”

“Because of Roe v. Wade, courts have interpreted the decision as a statutory mandate that the government must provide federal funding for elective abortion through federal programs,” he said. “In other words, no executive order or regulation can override a statutory mandate unless Congress passes a law that prohibits federal funding from being used in this manner.”

Republican Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas said executive orders are added and removed constantly and change with successive presidents. “If the Democrats were serious about avoiding federal funding of abortion, they would put it in the bill and subject it to a vote as opposed to using sleight of hand to cobble together a one-party coalition to pass a government takeover of over one-sixth of our economy costing over \$938 billion while not lowering insurance premiums at all,” Brownback said.

However, pro-life leaders who supported health care reform said the legislation would help reduce abortions. They say having access to health care will deter some women from having abortions, and the legislation includes a \$250 million provision to support prenatal, postnatal and adoption

incentives.

“For decades I have worked hard for both justice for the poor and for protection for the unborn because I believe the Bible teaches us both that God and God’s people have a special concern for the poor and also that God calls us to respect the sanctity of all human life, including the unborn,” said Ronald J. Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action and author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. “This bill is a huge leap forward on all of that because a truly pro-life stance does not start at conception and end at birth. It means respecting the sanctity of human life for all of a person’s life.”

In addition to concerns about the executive order being revoked, the National Right to Life said the order does not address seven pro-abortion provisions in the Senate version of the health bill.

“The executive order promised by President Obama was issued for political effect,” the group stated. “It changes nothing. It does not correct any of the serious pro-abortion provisions in the bill. The president cannot amend a bill by issuing an order, and the federal courts will enforce what the law says.”

Americans United for Life (AUL) Action said the executive order would not prevent insurance companies that pay for abortions through new health care exchanges from receiving federal subsidies.

“We will work to dismantle taxpayer-funded abortion at the federal level and begin an aggressive, state-by-state campaign to help states opt out of subsidizing plans that cover abortions through their exchanges,” AUL President Charmaine Yoest said.

The pro-life Susan B. Anthony (SBA) List Candidate Fund had planned to honor Stupak for his efforts to keep abortion funding out of the health care bill during its annual Campaign

for Life Gala Wednesday. But the group reversed its plans Sunday.

"By accepting this deal from the most pro-abortion president in American history, Stupak has not only failed to stand strong for unborn children, but also for his constituents and pro-life voters across the country," SBA List President Marjorie Dannenfelser said.

But Church of God in Christ Bishop Charles E. Blake said Stupak and other pro-life Democrats showed Christians who are morally conservative but economically and politically liberal that they have a home among Democrats.

"There are millions and millions of Christians and millions and millions of black people in our nation who felt they had to leave the Democratic Party because of its pro-choice positions, and we were in a tension between our principles morally and our social and economic orientation toward liberal principles," said Blake, who challenged Democrats on abortion when he spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 2008. "But all of that was synthesized and brought together yesterday. I think the Democratic Party will again be the home for millions and millions of people across our nation who love liberal economic, social and political principles but at same time are conservative morally and theologically."

Ironically, the pro-abortion National Organization for Women (NOW) also opposed the president's executive order, saying it and the Senate version of the health bill create a "burdensome" system that could greatly restrict abortion access.

"Contrary to the talking points circulated by congressional leaders, the bill passed today ultimately achieves the same outcome as the infamous Stupak-Pitts Amendment, namely the likely elimination of all private as well as public insurance coverage for abortion," NOW President Terry O'Neill said in a

statement Sunday. "It imposes a bizarre requirement on insurance plan enrollees who buy coverage through the health insurance exchanges to write two monthly checks (one for an abortion care rider and one for all other health care). Even employers will have to write two separate checks for each of their employees requesting the abortion rider."

The landmark health reform legislation is expected to insure 32 million of the 47 million Americans who reportedly lack health insurance. The bill, which President Obama is expected to sign into law tomorrow, expands Medicaid and subsidies to the poor, and will eventually prohibit insurance companies from being able to place lifetime caps or deny coverage to patients due to pre-existing conditions.

The bill also requires most Americans to purchase health insurance. Small businesses and the uninsured would be able to shop for coverage in health insurance exchanges, a marketplace that allows consumers to compare insurance plans. The exchanges are to be implemented by 2014.

Several pro-life groups and conservative lawmakers are looking toward November, when they hope to see Democrats who supported the health bill voted out of office.

"Now through Election Day 2010, these representatives will learn that votes have consequences," Dannenfelser said. "The SBA List Candidate Fund will work tirelessly to help defeat members who support this legislation and make sure their constituents know exactly how they voted."