

Text of Letter sent by Bishop Paul J. Swain to the South Dakota Congressional Delegation concerning Health Care Reform Legislation, October 2009

Dear (Congressional delegation)

The Catholic Church has long taught that all people should receive appropriate and respectful care when in need, sick, or injured. Catholic healthcare has been a leader in putting this teaching into practice for hundreds of years. In South Dakota, Catholic hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, hospice and other ministries, provide care and treatment, as well as spiritual support, for thousands each year.

Clearly there are deficiencies in the current healthcare system which should be addressed. It is imperative that any new policies be based on moral principles that protect the life and dignity of the human person, provide special protection for the poor and most vulnerable among us, and conform to principles of social justice. It also should be accomplished in a way that does not threaten the continuation of Catholic healthcare here and throughout the United States.

On behalf of Catholics in eastern South Dakota, to achieve effective and lasting reform I encourage you to keep the following principles in mind as healthcare legislation is considered in the days to come.

1. Healthcare in law and in practice should serve to protect the life and dignity of all people, from the moment of conception until natural death. Provisions supporting abortion, euthanasia, or embryonic stem cell research, whether directly or indirectly, should be specifically excluded in any legislation.
2. Freedom of conscience must be protected. The moral convictions of all healthcare workers, as well as those in the public who pay for healthcare, deserve your deepest respect. No person should be forced to choose between their properly formed conscience and their job in the healthcare profession.
3. Quality healthcare should be affordable and accessible to all people, no matter their financial status or age. Unborn children, the poor, legal immigrants, the elderly, as well as those nearing death, deserve the same quality and respectful care as those at other stages or conditions in life.
4. Reform should be governed by the principle of social justice known as subsidiarity. In general, “a community of higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1883). We in South Dakota have differing structures, institutions and needs from other areas of the country. This fact should be noted and accommodated.

I respectfully urge you to consider these principles as you debate and consider health care bills these next weeks.

Public service is a high calling with grave responsibility. Be assured of my prayers for you as you seek to serve those who you represent.

Yours in Christ,

<signed>

The Most Rev. Paul J. Swain

Bishop of Sioux Falls