

Killer bill

HEALTHCARE: Pro-life lawmakers raise alarm: Absent amendment, healthcare bill will subsidize and mandate abortion coverage | *Edward Lee Pitts*

WASHINGTON—On July 17, House lawmakers rode to the rescue of the nation's wild horse population, passing a bill to prevent their slaughter by adding millions of acres to their roaming lands.

But while lawmakers devoted tightly doled out floor time to debating the welfare of the West's estimated 36,000 wild horses, another life-and-death debate has been relegated to committee rooms: the fate of unborn children in the pending transformation of the nation's healthcare system.

A growing number of lawmakers from both parties are fearful that passage of the current healthcare proposal as written would lead to taxpayer--supported abortions.

Just days after the wild horse vote, concerned House members decided to kick-start the abortion debate. Gathering together inside the new Capitol Visitor's Center, the bipartisan group warned in a press conference that a "stealth abortion mandate" is real and would require insurance companies to include abortions as part of a basic coverage plan.

Already two amendments in the House and one in the Senate specifically to ban publicly funded abortions have been defeated. Meanwhile Office of Management and Budget Director Peter Orszag responded, "I'm not prepared to" when asked if he would rule out abortion funding in the legislation.

"Obamacare is the greatest threat to the lives and well-being of unborn children and their mothers since *Roe v. Wade*," says Rep. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican.

This is not just a Republican concern. Recently 20 House Democrats sent a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi warning that "we cannot support any healthcare reform proposal unless it explicitly excludes abortion."

Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., now puts the number of pro-life House Democrats opposed to the proposal at 39. That's a number that, combined with House Republicans and fiscally conservative Democrats, could hold back party leaders' plans to push a healthcare bill through Congress in the fall. The timeline has already been altered once after the proposal's \$1 trillion price tag and its creation of a controversial government-run insurance plan forced congressional leaders to abandon an August deadline.

Among the biggest red flags for pro-life legislators is the bill's creation of a Health Benefits Advisory Committee that would determine what procedures are covered under a public plan. The bill requires every American to have insurance that meets certain standards. "According to the president, in his own words, central to the idea of healthcare is the idea of reproductive health or abortion," said Rep. Joe Pitts, R-Pa. "That will be considered a minimum benefit."

Unless the legislation explicitly excludes abortion procedures, pro-life lawmakers predict that abortions will soon become part of the required insurance package. The stakes are high, Stupak argues, because buried in the 1,017-page health bill is language making it clear that federal standards would preempt any state law. That could put 200 state laws aimed at protecting life in jeopardy, Stupak says.

But requiring abortion coverage is not the only potential change. Healthcare legislation could also lead to taxpayers footing the abortion bill. The measure authorizes subsidies to purchase healthcare premiums for individuals and families who do not qualify for Medicaid. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that provision alone would cost taxpayers \$773 billion over the next decade. "Without such restrictions this legislation would certainly result in the federal funding of abortion on an unprecedented scale," Stupak says.

Supporters of current legislation say the bill doesn't specifically include abortion. But pro-life lawmakers say they have heard that before. Indeed, this current fight has echoes of the effort that resulted in the Hyde Amendment, passed in 1976, that bars the federal government from using tax dollars to pay for abortions through Medicaid. Medicaid didn't mention the word abortion, but courts ruled that the procedure fit under many of the broad categories outlined and had to be covered. Until the Hyde Amendment passed, Medicaid paid for hundreds

of thousands of abortions.

Today pro-life advocates fear this could happen again as the reach of the Hyde Amendment may not extend to provisions in the current healthcare bill.

That is why the lawmakers' press conference has led to a mounting grassroots effort that culminated last week when pro-life groups kicked off an aggressive public-relations campaign during which:

- Alveda King, with Priests for Life, led a group of African-American leaders in a demonstration outside one of Pelosi's offices. "Our message is clear; abortion is neither healthcare nor a benefit," said the niece of Martin Luther King. "It's genocide."

- Groups of up to 60 circulated through congressional office hallways praying that abortion does not become a part of Obama's health plan.

- Americans United for Life began soliciting online signatures for a letter to President Obama that calls for abortion exclusions.

- And more than 36,000 joined a webcast to listen to 20 conservative leaders—including James Dobson, Family Research Council's Tony Perkins, and Wendy Wright with Concerned Women for America—address the abortion challenge.

Despite this attention, Obama, in an interview with CBS News, said: "I think that it's appropriate for us to figure out how to just deliver on the cost savings and not get distracted by the abortion debate." But while the White House focuses on finances, one number that pro-life advocates say should not be ignored is 71 percent—the share of Americans a recent Zogby poll said opposed requiring insurance plans to pay for abortions.

Repercussions extend beyond taxpayer dollars, says John Bruchalski, a doctor with Virginia's Divine Mercy Care Center. He predicts an exodus of pro-life doctors from the OB/GYN field. Already medical professionals feel threatened by the Obama administration's announced intention to undo regulations that protect practitioners who decline to perform procedures that violate their religious or moral beliefs.

Bruchalski also fears that any mandates to include abortion coverage could lead to the expansion of abortion facilities beyond mainly urban areas into rural America. "If this goes through without clear language, it's a Trojan horse," he said.

Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, Director of the Christian Defense Coalition and one of the organizers of last week's Capitol Hill prayer vigils, said he sees hope in the Democrats' missed August deadline. "This delay is very important because it will give people across the country a chance to dissect what's in this."

As lawmakers and grassroots groups try to make sure pro-life concerns do not get lost in the healthcare scramble, a mixed group of pro-life and pro-abortion lawmakers got together in an ironic twist: announcing new legislation that they say will reduce the number of abortions.

This marriage of opposing groups to prevent unintended pregnancies recalls one of the stated goals of Obama's new faith-based office. But one wonders how lawmakers can go about reducing abortions while simultaneously subsidizing with taxpayer dollars a new insurance mandate that includes abortion? Washington will have this fall to decide if healthcare really is about saving lives.

Washington's prescription

[Click here to read](#) WORLD's own summary of what appears to be in store for the country if HR 3200, "America's Affordable Health Choices Act," becomes law. — *The Editors*