

From **Richard Doerflinger, USCCB Pro Life, on Health Care Bill**

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Dear colleagues:

The USCCB and NCHLA will be putting out reactions and follow-up materials in due course today regarding the 54-45 vote to table (set aside) the Nelson pro-life amendment. I just wanted personally to give a word of gratitude and encouragement to all those who worked to get the Senate to maintain current protections against federal abortion funding. We made a very good showing against overwhelming odds, and we continue to have strong support for our position in the House where the legislation must ultimately return; in the meantime there will be more changes in the Senate, including a "manager's amendment" that may or may not include some provisions to address our strong objections to the current bill on pro-life issues. The fight is far from over.

Our opponents started out with what was probably a bare Senate majority against the Hyde amendment. To this they added the strategy of constantly and passionately obfuscating the truth that this amendment is basically the same as the Hyde amendment -- they claimed over and over again that current law only prevents direct use of a federal dollar for an abortion, and that this bill's denial of federal funds for entire health plans covering abortion was some kind of unprecedented and radical overreach (instead of the simple continuation of current law that it is). This gave us the spectacle of one pro-abortion Senator after another saying with a straight face that he or she supports the longstanding restrictions of the Hyde amendment, while voting against that policy in real life (and by the way, save all your Senator's statements from the Congressional Record along these lines because we'll need them next year when they might attack the Hyde amendment!). We must step up our efforts to educate the Congress, the media and the general public as to what is really going on in this debate.

To put the 45 votes in perspective: Some commentators asked us in the prior weeks how we hoped to get more than 40 votes, as Collins and Snowe would provide Republican votes for abortion and at most we would have the support of Nelson and Casey, with the two groups canceling each other out. We surprised them in a number of ways: Casey and Nelson both became original co-sponsors, with the lead sponsor of the amendment a Democrat; we got five votes that the critics did not expect, including Sen. Kaufman of Delaware (former top aide to Joseph Biden) who had never cast a pro-life vote; our Senate allies were prepared, articulate, committed, and factual, rebutting every false claim our opponents made (which of course only led them to tell the same falsehoods more often and more loudly, and to rely more heavily on inducing guilt among male Senators who might be tempted to contradict the female Democratic Senators on abortion).

The 45 votes means that if the Senate had followed normal procedure, taking the House-passed bill and working from that, they could never have produced the 60 votes needed for an amendment to remove the Stupak amendment. This arms us well for the next steps in the process, which may involve a "ping-pong" match between House and Senate or other avenues. We won't give up until we have a reform of health care that truly respects the life of everyone. Thank you again for your wonderful efforts!

Rich Doerflinger
USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities