

Is it reform?

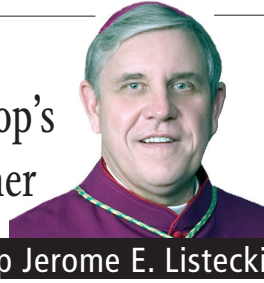
Perhaps by the time this column goes to print, calm will have prevailed over the debates surrounding health care reform. However, I doubt it. It's amazing the emotional response that's been generated by the various proposals offered by our elected officials. I am reminded of that old comedian's joke: What's one of the great lies told in our society? "Hi, I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." All of us have had our difficulties with government bureaucracies, be it the IRS, Immigration and Naturalization, Social Security, etc. Yet the function of government is to promote the common good. Many will disagree as to the best manner through which the common good is achieved.

Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, extended the ongoing theological development of the Church's social teaching in his most recent encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate" ("Love in Truth"). There is a confidence that the Holy Father expresses in seeking the truth which finds its ultimate meaning in God. When any institution, technology or economic theory fails to understand how it serves the dignity of the human person and instead serves itself, it fails in love and in truth.

Almost everyone agrees that the health care system needs reform. Spiraling costs, uninsured citizens and the burden placed on our hospitals are just a few of the problems facing this complex issue. It requires a national investigation and debate. However, before we agree to a reform, perhaps we should discuss what aspects of the current system can or should be corrected.

In November of 2008, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops was involved with the extended threat to the unborn in the proposed support of the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA). It was apparent at the outset of the new Congress that FOCA would not pass

The Bishop's Corner



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The proponents of that legislation implied that, although FOCA could not be achieved as a single piece of legislation, a new strategy would be to achieve the goals of FOCA through various legislative acts.

With many elected officials stating that the healthcare legislation will not support the use of public funds for abortion, it is strange to me that all the amendments so far which prohibit the use of federal funds for abortion have been rejected. I'm opposed to abortion on religious and intellectual grounds. I don't want my government supporting the destruction of human life by providing tax payer dollars for those procedures.

Abortion supported by tax payer dollars is no reform, and I personally would be opposed to any plan that did not explicitly exclude abortion. It seems to me that the old adage applies: If you mean it, put it in writing.

The cost of reform put on the backs of the elderly is also no reform. There has been a growing euthanasia movement in our society. Some states have passed and proposed legislation that supports active euthanasia. It becomes very attractive economically to ration medical support or eliminate medical care to the elderly. Have we begun to view the elderly as nonproductive, useless or expendable?

Many proponents have argued that no active euthanasia is a part of our reform. However, passive euthanasia will be utilized if there is suddenly a denial

of available care because of age. I'm reminded of the satirical piece written by Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) called "A Modest Proposal." His solution to the famine confronting Ireland was to eat young children. It certainly captured everyone's attention. Likewise, killing everyone 60 years of age or over could solve our economic health crisis. I turned 60 years of age this year, and that type of legislation wouldn't get my vote.

One of the cherished aspects of our current health care is patient autonomy – the ability to be an active participant in the type of health care we receive. It is directly related to our sense of personal freedom. We value our relationships with our doctors. Many of these men and women have entered the medical field because of their care and sensitivity for humanity. We, their patients, have a confidence in their professional skills and seek their advice. Will patient autonomy now be eliminated in favor of governmental panels or boards to determine the appropriate response to our health problems? One can fight private insurance companies, but how does one fight city hall?

Remember the scene in the Wizard of Oz after Dorothy had completed the task assigned by the great and imperial Oz? She was intimidated by the all-powerful figure until little Toto, her dog, pulled the curtain back and exposed the mere man manipulating the deception.

Unfortunately we often find out too late that there are hidden agendas, special considerations and support for constituencies in any new legislation. We need to expose those elements of any legislation which goes contrary to the dignity of the human person or limits our freedom to serve "love in truth." Call me naïve, but at least our elected officials should read the over one thousand pages of any bill before we begin to call it reform.

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