

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

Memo

To: Members of the US House of Representatives
From: Catholics for Choice
Date: May 3, 2011
Re: Upcoming vote on HR 3

In the next few days, you will have the opportunity to vote on a bill which could starkly affect the ability for women and men across the US to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions. The “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” (HR 3) isn’t about taxpayer funding; it’s about curtailing access to abortion. It’s an attempt by some to make seeking an abortion as difficult and costly as possible through any legislative vehicle at their disposal.

The majority of the 68 million American Catholics, in fact, the majority of Americans do not believe government should be a party to the private deliberations women and their families make about healthcare. The position of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and their conservative allies—opposing abortion in every instance, even in cases of rape, incest or when an abortion is necessary to preserve a woman’s health or life—is shared by fewer than 15 percent of American Catholic voters,ⁱ and according to the bishops’ own polling, by only 11 percent of the American populace at large.

If enacted, HR 3 will actually create more challenges, hurdles and barriers for the most vulnerable Americans and cost American taxpayers and your constituents more in uncompensated healthcare costs created by those who cannot access safe, affordable and reliable healthcare when they need it. The bill will enshrine in the law many unreasonable obstacles to safe and legal healthcare for American women—including lower-income and other vulnerable women—who access healthcare through our nation’s safety net programs. These include women in military families, women who seek care through the Indian Health Service and women whose insurance is in any way affiliated with the government. The effect of this ban will be that women who are already facing challenges accessing healthcare services will have to overcome additional delays and costs to receive the healthcare they need.

Additionally, HR 3 seeks to enact expansions of so-called conscience clauses, more accurately called refusal clauses, policies that allow healthcare providers and institutions to refuse to provide, pay for or refer for services based on their religious views. The bill establishes an unbalanced preference for those who would refuse to provide services over both those who wish to provide comprehensive services to their patients and those patients who need access to safe and legal services and medications. These more stringent restrictions expand the right of refusal to include any “health-care entity” which is defined broadly to include HMOs, insurance plans and “any other kind of health care facility, organization, or plan.”ⁱⁱ Expanding the right of refusal and those who could claim this right would result in Americans being denied the ordinary, legal, safe and reasonable healthcare they need and deserve, and it would tie the hands of doctors and nurses who want to provide that care.

Catholics support healthcare that is both accessible and comprehensive and support the right of women and men in good conscience to make important reproductive healthcare decisions for themselves.

Our Catholic social justice tradition encourages us to advocate for the poor, and our intellectual tradition requires our respect for conscience-based decisions people make about their lives, including decisions about reproductive health. Catholics support policies that enable women to make decisions about whether to become pregnant or whether to continue a pregnancy. Large majorities of Catholic voters support access to and coverage for abortions—either in private- or government-run health systems. Catholic support for family planning and abortion is grounded in the core principles of Catholicism, which respect the moral agency of all people and their right to follow their consciences on all matters.

The US bishops and their conservative allies in Congress support this bill because it furthers their ultimate goal to make it impossible for women who need abortions to receive them.

US Catholics respect women’s ability to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions.

We ask you to appreciate the breadth of Catholic opinion on these issues and not be taken in by the false claims of the USCCB about this bill. We urge you to vote for the rights of women and men in good conscience to make important reproductive healthcare decisions for themselves and for access for all to the safe and legal healthcare they deserve and need. US Catholics stand up for those who will suffer if this restrictive legislation is allowed to pass. They, and we, urge you to oppose HR 3.

¹ USCCB, “Letter to Congress from the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities,” January 21, 2011.

ⁱ Belden Russonello & Stewart, “Catholic Voters’ Views on Health Care Reform and Reproductive Health Care Services: A National Opinion Survey of Catholic voters conducted for Catholics for Choice,” September 2009.

ⁱⁱ “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act”, HR 3, 112th Cong. § 311 (a) (2011).