



Cardinal Justin Rigali on FOCA

Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities USCCB

December 23, 2008
My Friends in Christ:

As you know, at our November General Meeting the bishops affirmed a statement by Cardinal George that welcomed the historic election of President Obama and offered our commitment to work with him and the members of the new Congress for the common good of all. Among the many important issues on the Church's agenda, Cardinal George mentioned economic justice, immigration reform, better education, health care for all, and religious freedom. The Conference has already begun to engage with the transition teams on a variety of issues. Cardinal George also urged the new Administration and Congress not to divide the nation with aggressively pro-abortion policies, legislation and executive orders.

Due to this concern, there was a unanimous vote of the full body of bishops in November to mobilize the resources of the Conference, dioceses and the entire Catholic community to prevent the elimination of current pro-life laws and policies by the Administration and/or the Congress including passage of the "Freedom of Choice Act." As Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, I am so very grateful for the tremendous support which has been offered to date by my brother bishops from all across the country.

As we have done in the past in response to other significant threats to human life, the Committee on Pro-Life Activities has authorized our moving forward with a massive postcard campaign to urge Congress to retain laws against federal funding and promotion of abortion and oppose any bill that includes provisions contained in the "Freedom of Choice Act" (FOCA) or any similar measure. The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA) and the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities are coordinating these efforts in collaboration with many offices at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. I am happy to report that many millions of post cards have already been ordered by dioceses across the country. Because of the tight time frame, a larger than anticipated demand for postcards, and the complicated logistics of distribution, dioceses are free to modify the schedule, based on local needs. We anticipate that most parish activity will take place beginning with the last Sunday in January and continuing through the first two Sundays in February. This is the preferred window because pro-life provisions in the annual appropriations bills will be subject to attack in congressional committees by February.

There are important reasons why this postcard campaign is needed at this time and within this time frame:

- Since the current legislation keeping government agencies funded expires in March, one of Congress's first orders of business will be to approve an omnibus appropriations bill funding these agencies for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009 (which expires September 30). Some of these bills which will be considered in late January or February already propose to reverse existing pro-life provisions such as the ban on funding abortions through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. In March, Congress will begin drafting the new appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2010, and all pro-life protections in these bills will be subject to reversal by simply not including them. The new Congress includes the largest number of pro-abortion members since 1993 so holding on to these pro life provisions will be a great challenge.
- A 55-page document from 63 pro-abortion groups submitted to the Obama-Biden transition team outlines the plans for "Advancing Reproductive Rights and Health in a New Administration." FOCA is included in the priority to improve access to abortion care. We don't know how much of this anti-life agenda will be embraced by the transition team nor do we know if and when a bill containing the provisions of a Freedom of Choice Act will be introduced. What we do know is that there are likely threats to pro-life policies and riders in anticipated Executive Orders and in the Appropriations process which will play out as soon as the new Congress convenes.

Given the many unknowns that we are dealing with, our broad message to Congress is still on target. We urge Congress to retain laws against federal funding and promotion of abortion and to oppose any effort to pass the provisions contained in the "FOCA Agenda". We are concerned about the dismantling of current pro-life policies regardless of how this effort is packaged.

More details about other aspects of this campaign as well as how to send postcards electronically will be coming after the Christmas holidays but I wanted you to be aware of progress to date. Once again, I thank you for your dedication to this effort and express grateful appreciation of your leadership. Please join me in praying for the success of this effort and for true progress in building a Culture of Life in our nation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia
Chairman
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