



November 18, 2009

COMMENTARY

Ban on federally funded abortions long established

A great deal of misinformation is being spread about the Stupak-Ellsworth-Pitts amendment in the health care bill passed by the U.S. House Representatives (<http://www.freep.com/article/20091112/OPINION01/911120382/1069/Opinion01/Stupaks-anti-abortion-amendment-tramples-women-and-the-law>)>"Stupak's anti-abortion amendment tramples women and the law," Nov. 12). I must set the record straight.

The ban on federal funding for abortion is long-standing policy contained in the Hyde amendment, in place since 1977, and has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Hyde language prohibits federal funding of abortion in all federal health programs, including Medicaid and the Federal Employee Health Benefit plans. Our amendment simply includes the Hyde language in the Affordable Health Care for America Act.

Under this amendment, only the public health insurance option and private plans that receive federal subsidies will be prohibited from covering abortion services. It does not prevent private plans from offering abortion services, and it does not prohibit individuals purchasing plans with their own money from purchasing abortion services. The amendment specifically states that even those who receive federal subsidies can purchase a supplemental policy with private money to cover abortion services.

Our amendment explicitly provides exceptions that allow all policies to cover abortion services in the case of rape, incest or life of the mother.

The Free Press argues this amendment makes it harder for poor women to obtain abortion procedures. But under current policy, the poor receive their health care through Medicaid and cannot have taxpayer-funded abortions. Our amendment simply keeps this policy consistent.

Segregating funds has never been allowed under Hyde language. For example, federal employee health plans offer private health insurance policies to federal employees. Federal employees pay a portion of their health premiums with the government paying the balance. Yet federal employees cannot put the funds they contribute in a separate account to be used to cover abortion services. The Hyde precedent is very clear.

I have long been an advocate of health care reform, but as the Free Press recognizes, I have also always been pro-life. I made my concerns with the abortion provisions in this bill clear in July. Rather than work with me in good faith, pro-choice members and House leadership chose to ignore those concerns until they realized that they would not pass the reform in the House without the support of pro-life Democrats.

I am not alone in believing federal funds should not be used to pay for abortions; 64 Democrats voted for the amendment. Additionally a recent study conducted by International Communications Research found 67% of Americans are opposed to using federal dollars to fund abortions.

I am disappointed that the Detroit Free Press simply repeated the rhetoric circulated by opponents of our amendment rather than take an objective look at the facts.

U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak

Democrat of Menominee
