

Press Release – October 8, 2008

Catholic Democrats calls on McCain campaign to acknowledge the fundamental right to health care

Catholic Bishops recognize "a fundamental human right," an approach to health care advanced throughout Obama's career



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Boston, MA - *Catholic Democrats* is calling on the McCain campaign to acknowledge the fundamental right to health care, especially for the most vulnerable of our population. The second presidential debate Tuesday night focused on the global economic meltdown, and both candidates put health care reform as a priority in addressing the needs of American citizens during this time of economic crisis. But reflecting their starkly different philosophies, the two senators differed dramatically on whether healthcare is a 'right' or a personal 'responsibility.'

Responding to that question, Senator John McCain put the onus for health squarely on the individual. He answered, "It is certainly my responsibility. It is certainly small-business people and others, and they understand that responsibility. American citizens understand that. Employers understand that."

In contrast, Senator Barack Obama responded, "I think it should be a right for every American. In a country as wealthy as ours, for us to have people who are going bankrupt because they can't pay their medical bills -- for my mother to die of cancer at the age of 53 and have to spend the last months of her life in the hospital room arguing with insurance companies because they're saying that this may be a pre-existing condition and they don't have to pay her treatment, there's something fundamentally wrong about that."

"The U.S. Catholic bishops refer to health care definitively as a right," said Dr. Patrick Whelan, president of *Catholic Democrats*. He cited their November 2007 document [Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#), in which the bishops write that "Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. With an estimated 47 million Americans lacking health care coverage, it is also an urgent national priority."

During the debate Senator Obama described his health plan in detail, including measures that would result in coverage for all American children. He pointed out that Senator McCain had voted repeatedly against expanding the current Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) to provide care for all of the 12 million children currently uninsured. Senator McCain offered no response. Senator McCain has been a champion of deregulation in the banking world, arguably at the heart of the global financial crisis, and he continued last night to advocate for similar deregulation within the American health care system.

"Senator Obama has offered a plan that will go a long way toward providing healthcare for most of the tens of millions of adults who are currently uninsured, and for all American children," said Dr. Whelan, a pediatric specialist. "Senator Obama's commitment to the uninsured was more than just a sound bite

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in this one debate."

In an interview published last week in the [Catholic Digest](#), Senator Obama said, "I've tried to apply the precepts of compassion and care for the vulnerable that are so central to Catholic teachings to my work, [such as in] making health care a right for all Americans - I was the sponsor in the state legislature for the Bernardin Amendment, named after Cardinal Bernardin, a wonderful figure in Chicago I had the opportunity to work with who said that health care should be a right."

"Senator McCain's plan to tax employee health benefits just like all other income is a radical experiment that could result in an additional 20 million working people losing the health insurance they currently have," Dr. Whelan said. "The Obama reforms to our health system are truly rooted in Gospel values. If the Catholic notion of the 'common good' really means anything, it surely motivates us to help keep all Americans healthy through an insurance system that covers everyone."

About Catholic Democrats

Catholic Democrats is an association of state based groups representing a Catholic voice within the Democratic Party, and advancing a public understanding of the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and its potential to help solve the broad range of problems confronting all Americans. For more information about Catholic Democrats please go to www.catholicdemocrats.org