Health Care Reform in 2009

President Obama has asked Congress to have a health care reform bill on his desk by October. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is a long-time supporter of health care reform that provides accessible and affordable health care for all. With health care reform once again taking center stage, the USCCB has offered criteria for reform consistent with Catholic Social Teaching, acknowledging that every person has a right to health care, as a basic human right. This principle is rooted in the biblical call to heal the sick and to serve "the least of these," recognizing the primacy of human life, dignity, and the common good.

Unfortunately, statistics published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2008 indicate that increasing numbers of Americans are uninsured, and these numbers continue to grow by 14,000 each day. Over 46 million Americans lack health care coverage, and almost 20 percent of the uninsured are children. Over one-half of the uninsured hold full-time jobs year-round.

In light of these statistics and the difficult task facing Congress as it begins drafting legislation, the Bishops expressed their fundamental principles of health care reform:

- A health policy should be truly universal, with respect for human life and dignity
- Access should be granted to all, with special concern given to the poor.
- A health policy should pursue the common good and preserve pluralism, including freedom of conscience and variety of options.
- Costs should be restrained and applied equitably across the spectrum of payers.

At the recent U.S. Senate Committee on Finance Roundtable Discussion on "Expanding Health Care Coverage," the USCCB offered additional criteria for reforming health care. These criteria include comprehensive benefits, with access to sufficient care for persons who are chronically ill or dying, and quality and equity in health services, in the training of providers, and in the informed participation of individuals and families in health care decisions.

The Bishops offer their prayers and support for the federal legislators as they begin the process of reforming health care. They have stated it is a crucial national priority to create a health care system capable of offering accessible, affordable, and quality health care that affirms the life and dignity of all persons.