



**AMERICANS  
UNITED**  
*for Separation of  
Church and State*

518 C Street, N.E.

Washington, D.C. 20002

(202) 466-3234 phone

(202) 466-2587 fax

americansunited@au.org

www.au.org

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**STATEMENT OF THE REV. BARRY W. LYNN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
AMERICANS UNITED FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE**

In the United States, the institutions of government and religion are separate.

This is not just my opinion. It is the law of the land. Our Constitution prohibits Congress from making laws “respecting an establishment of religion.” The Supreme Court has stated more than once that laws must not advance religion or have a religious purpose.

How surprising and appalling, then, to see that a provision designed to curtail women’s right to abortion was slipped into the health-care bill at the behest of a powerful religious group, a provision that reflects the doctrines of that group.

Rep. Bart Stupak told the Associated Press, “The Catholic Church used their power — their clout, if you will — to influence this issue. They had to. It’s a basic teaching of the religion.”

Therein lies the problem. It is not the job of government to enforce religious teaching. Abortion is a constitutionally protected medical procedure in this country. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has sought to change that fact, but the bishops have been unable to persuade the American people that their view is correct. Indeed, polls show that the church hierarchy has been unable to persuade even its own members to adopt the church’s narrow view on legal abortion.

The church hierarchy now seeks through legislative action to accomplish something it has failed to get through its own efforts at moral suasion. Is it any wonder that those of us who are not even members of the church are upset and angry about this? We wish to live in the 21st Century, not an echo of medieval Spain. We do not wish to have the doctrines of the Catholic Church – or indeed any faith – imposed on us through law.

I understand the desire of the House leadership to pass a health-care bill. The issue has been on the national agenda in some form or another since the days of Theodore Roosevelt.

But health-care reform that attacks the rights of more than half of the population by subjecting some of their basic and most intimate decisions to a large and powerful church’s governing body is not reform at all. It is a huge step backward. It would be better to dump the entire bill than to allow it to become law with these noxious provisions intact.

*Your voice in the battle to preserve religious liberty*

Those of us standing here today may be accused of “anti-Catholicism” for what we have said. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know that across this country, Catholics of goodwill have joined us in opposing this heavy-handed move by the bishops and their Washington lobbyists. You can feel the anger stirring across the land; a backlash is building. It will not be silenced, and we are here today to give voice to that movement.

I have always taken as one of my guiding lights America’s first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy. In a famous 1960 speech he said, “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act.... I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish, where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source -- where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials....”

Those were wise words. We best honor them today not by enshrining them in books and nodding in agreement when we read them. We honor those words by putting them into practice and ensuring that America upholds the separation of church and state

There is still time for the House to correct its mistake. We are here today to call on the leadership to do so immediately.