

Toolkit for the Interfaith Weekend of Action for Women's Health November 20-22, 2009

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Now is the time for the voices of the faithful to be heard!

When the House passed its historic health care reform bill on the evening of November 7th, they also adopted the Stupak-Pitts amendment, a dangerous provision that would ban coverage of abortion services from private and public insurance plans for millions of women in America. This amendment expands restrictions on access to abortion services well beyond the Hyde Amendment, which has prohibited public funding of abortion in most instances since 1977.

Given this setback in the House, our sharp focus is now on the Senate. We are demanding that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid ensure that language similar to the Stupak ban does not become part of the Senate bill.

We are harnessing the power of the faith community to add the needed muscle and a moral voice to fight the Stupak-Pitts amendment and the forces behind it.

There are three ways you can help:

1. **Join us for an Interfaith Weekend of Action November 20-22, 2009.** We are asking clergy and faith-inspired supporters to join with us in conducting a weekend of prayerful affirmation that illustrates that people of faith support reproductive health care and want their beliefs and values heard. We are including a toolkit designed to assist you in your efforts to support meaningful and comprehensive health reform - one that does not make women worse off.

In this toolkit you will find:

- Timeline of events
- Petition - The Future of Choice and Women's Health
- Health Care Reform Talking Points to provide guidance and serve as a reference for sermons on women's reproductive health care
- A sample prayer for choice
- Sample bulletin ad
- Additional resources

2. **Sign the petition:** <http://www.capwiz.com/rcrc/issues/alert/?alertid=14354551&type=PR>

A coalition of approximately 40 pro-choice, progressive groups are urging all of our supporters to sign an online petition asking President Obama to eliminate the Stupak-Pitts amendment and protect women's health. In this toolkit you will find a hard copy version of the petition to print for offline signature gathering.

We will deliver hard copies of these petitions to the Senate on Dec. 2, so please add this petition to any and every activity you're planning between now and Nov. 30. We need as many signatures as

possible— think broadly! Make sure to ask the following groups to sign: staff, participants in your educational programs, friends, family, neighbors, congregants, coalition partners and volunteers.

- 3. December 2, 2009 – National Day of Action.** Join us on December 2, 2009, in Washington, DC, for a National Day of Action on Capitol Hill. We will be lobbying key targets, as well as hosting events throughout the day to make our voices heard on health care reform. If you can join us, please RSVP to Ellen Sittenfeld Battistelli ebattistelli@rcrc.org

Timeline of events:

Weekend of Nov. 20-22: Interfaith Weekend of Action—include progressive messages on women’s health in health care reform in sermons, prayers, calls to worship, congregational announcements and newsletters and/or other liturgical pieces, and gather petition signatures.

Week of Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving week): Republican members are scheduling Town Halls; if you can, please join our Health Care for America Now (HCAN) partners who are participating to ensure these members hear a pro-women’s health, pro-reform message from constituents. More information to follow.

Nov. 30: Send all of the **hard-copy** petition signatures you’ve gathered for printing and delivery in person here in DC. Fax to 202-628-7716 (and call 202-628-7700 or email ebattistelli@rcrc.org to confirm delivery).

Dec. 2: Senate Lobby Day! Join us in DC for a press conference in the Senate Park at **Constitution Ave. and Delaware Ave. NE** and to lobby your Senators (and House members) to pass a health care reform bill that protects women and comprehensive reproductive health services. Contact Ellen Sittenfeld Battistelli ebattistelli@rcrc.org for more information.

Dec. 3: National Senate call-in day, 1-4pm ET. Please call the Capitol switchboard - **202-224-3121** - and ask to speak to your Senator’s office. You will need to call again and ask for the second Senator’s office. See the message under “Talking Points” below.

Dec. 4-6: National Weekend of Action! Keep the pressure on your Senators in your state—work with your coalition partners to schedule an in-state meeting to present our current asks and deliver your state’s petitions to your Senators’ offices. If you would like to participate in a district meeting with your Senator, please contact Ellen Sittenfeld Battistelli at ebattistelli@rcrc.org or call 202-628-7700 x21

Talking Points

- Clergy from many faiths oppose the attempts to undermine all national health care reform and affirm that public access to health care, including reproductive services, should be free from outside parochial biases and religious restrictions. (See sample press statement of religious leaders below)
- One particular religious belief system must not be imposed on all of us especially at the expense of public health.
- Health care reform should strengthen and protect women's health care, not weaken it.
- While we applaud the efforts of our elected leaders in passing this historic piece of legislation, it is unacceptable that women's health was sacrificed in order to pass a bill with a supposed intent of expanding health care access.
- The Stupak/Pitts amendment violates the spirit of health care reform, which is meant to guarantee quality, affordable health care coverage for all. In fact, this amendment would create a two-tiered system that would punish women, particularly those with low and middle incomes, the very people this bill is intended to assist.
- Those who support this amendment do NOT speak for all religious leaders and people of faith. We have a special responsibility to bear witness in support of equal access to health care for all - in fact, it is our moral obligation. It is our duty to truthfully inform the public, including elected representatives, so they may understand the theological and moral basis for real health care reform. Therefore, we must oppose those who wish to take an enormous step backward on women's rights and exclude reproductive health care from any health care reform legislation.
- A government committed to human rights and democracy can privilege the teachings of one religion over another. No single religious voice can speak for all faith traditions on abortion, nor should government take sides on religious differences. Women must have the right to apply or reject the principles of their own faith without legal restrictions. We oppose any attempt to make specific religious doctrine concerning abortion the law for all Americans or for the women of the world.

A SAMPLE PRAYER FOR CHOICE

As People of God We Seek Justice, by Reverend Roselyn Smith Withers

Leader: Today, we pray together in the presence of one another and the people of God. We remember the words of the prophets and the great teachers. We call upon the spirits of our ancestors and ask for the blessings of the Creator of us all.

All: As people of God, we seek justice.

Leader: We pray together, not because we must but because we may. We pray together because our commonalities are greater than our differences and because in our togetherness, our differences are honored and God's vastness is praised.

All: As people of God, we seek justice.

Leader: We stand together, recognizing the risks of solidarity, affirming the power of our presence and celebrating the pro-choice legacy of courage and commitment, justice and peace.

All: As people of God, we seek justice.

Leader: We stand together, remembering the doctors, health care workers and the other innocent people who have given their lives in the struggle for our right to choose.

All: As people of God, we seek justice. We are praying people who are pro-choice. We accept the responsibility, claim the tradition and we embrace the right to choose prayerfully with the knowledge that God is with us in all things. AMEN

Sample Bulletin Insert

Protect Women's Health in Health Reform

As faith-inspired leaders, we faithfully endorse a health reform plan that

- ✓ makes women's health a priority by ensuring coverage of reproductive health care and access to the providers that millions of women know and trust;
- ✓ provides access to high-quality, affordable health care for all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status;
- ✓ is non-coercive and non-exploitive, preserves the individual's right to privacy, does not enshrine one religion's view or doctrine, and secures one's right to sexual and reproductive self-determination.

We believe that such self-determination will contribute to an enhancement of the quality of life and strong family relationships.

Add your name to an on-line petition to President Obama saying that health care reform must not be a vehicle for expanding restrictions on access to abortion <http://www.capwiz.com/rcrc/issues/alert/?alertid=14354551&type=PR>

Call the Capitol switchboard - 202-224-3121 - and ask to speak to your Senator's office. You will need to call again and ask for the second Senator's office. Let them know that health care reform must be true to its mission and make access to care more accessible. New restrictions to abortion are not acceptable.

Additional Resources:

Joint Statement of Religious Leaders on Stupak Amendment
http://www.rcrc.org/news/Stupak_Amendment_Joint%20Statement%20110909.cfm

National Survey of Catholic Voters For Catholics for Choice
<http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/documents/PollSummary.pdf>

An Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Abortion as a Moral Decision
http://www.religioustheology.com/sites/default/files/open_letters/abortionopenletter.pdf

NCJW Condemns House Health Care Vote Against Abortion Rights
http://www.ncjw.org/content_4005.cfm?navID=218

It's Up to the Senate! Religious Leaders & First Amendment Advocates Call for Health Care Reform Without Religious Restrictions
<http://www.rcrc.org/>

WE AFFIRM: Religious Organizations Support Reproductive Choice
http://www.rcrc.org/pdf/We_affirm.pdf