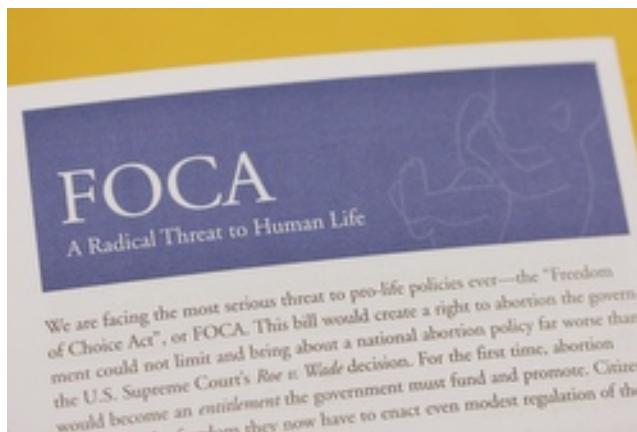


Local parishes join nationwide campaign to stop FOCA legislation



By Carolee McGrath *The Catholic Observer*, Diocese of Springfield, MA, Feb.13, 2009, p.6

SPRINGFIELD – Parishes in the Springfield Diocese will join parishes across the nation in participating in a postcard campaign asking Congress not to reverse current pro-life policies or to make abortion a constitutional right.

Springfield Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell has joined other bishops from across the country, urging Catholics to stand together and against the Freedom of Choice Act.

The bill, known as FOCA, could roll back hard fought restrictions against abortion that have saved the lives of countless children. FOCA, which has been around for 20 years, was last introduced in the 110th Congress in April of 2007. It has not been introduced this session yet, but Catholic leaders are being vigilant.

“If it’s the same as last year, it will be one of the most dangerous bills put before Congress,” said Bishop McDonnell. As written, FOCA states every woman has the “fundamental right to choose to bear a child; terminate a pregnancy prior to fetal viability; or terminate a pregnancy after viability when necessary to protect her life or her health.”

The diocese has begun distributing educational materials for parish bulletin inserts on the various aspects of FOCA. Following that, postcards will be available in local parishes during the weekend of March 7-8. Parishioners may sign them and send them to their senators and representatives. The Archdiocese of Boston has also targeted that weekend for their postcard campaign.

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of General Counsel, along with other legal analysts, the Freedom of Choice Act could go well beyond Roe, eliminating hard fought restrictions on abortion, such as:

- * Parental notification;
- * Informed consent laws which give women information on health risks and fetal development;

* The ban on partial birth abortion;

* Laws protecting the conscience rights of doctors, nurses, and faith based hospitals that refuse to do abortions.

“There are rumors that it’s going to have some modifications from last time; we don’t know what it is. But it is one of the most pernicious things to happen in a long time,” added Bishop McDonnell.

It’s unclear when exactly FOCA will be introduced, but it has plenty of support. President Barack Obama made a campaign pledge to a Planned Parenthood audience in July 2007 that FOCA would be one of the first bills he would sign as president. In fact, the then-Sen. Obama was one of the cosponsors of FOCA.

“Abortion advocates are newly energized because Congress has the most pro-abortion members in 16 years,” said Deirdre A. McQuade, the assistant director for policy and communications at the USCCB’s Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities. “The radical agenda would turn abortion into a fundamental ‘right’ that the government would have to subsidize with taxpayer monies.”

Catholic leaders also warn that FOCA could be broken up and hidden in other pieces of legislation. “While FOCA would accomplish the abortion promotion agenda all at once, other bills could realize the same agenda in a piecemeal fashion,” continued McQuade.

“For example, widely supported pro-life measures in appropriation bills are already at risk, including the longstanding Hyde amendment, which has prohibited the use of taxpayer funds for most abortions, and the Hyde/Weldon amendment preventing government discrimination against health care providers who do not perform or refer for abortions.”

Bishops have said they want to work with the new president. But they have expressed disappointment with President Obama’s swift reversal of the Mexico City Policy, which had prevented the U.S. from funding international organizations that promote and provide abortions

According to the National Right to Life, the lives of more than 49 million babies have been cut short by abortion since 1973. To put that into perspective, that means one in four pregnancies end in abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive rights policy group.

“I am confident we can stop this in Congress before it ever gets to the President for the signature he has promised,” said Father Frank Pavone, national director for Priests for Life. Father Pavone said people need to realize that the restrictions on abortion, that could be rolled back, have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of babies.

He pointed to a study done by Michael New, an assistant political science professor at the University of Alabama and a visiting fellow at the Family Research Council. New looked at teenage abortion rates in all 50 states from 1985 to 1999 and found that state parental notification laws reduced abortion rates by an average of 13.6 percent. States that require the involvement of two parents dropped the abortion rate among minors

by 31 percent.

“That’s significant. When the numbers of abortions drop, the abortion industry gets weaker because their strength is the money that’s coming in from the abortions,” Father Pavone said.

Church leaders said they want to reach out to all Catholics, no matter how they voted. “Catholics want to send a strong message to Congress to protect existing pro-life policies,” said McQuade. “The new Congress will see they should not divide our nation with policies that offend pro-life values of the majority of Americans.”

While a massive campaign is underway to get the word out about FOCA, one of the thousands of pro-life teenagers at the recent March for Life in Washington, D.C., Shannon O’Brien, of Ft. Washington, Md., said it all boils down to this: “All those children that are inside their mothers’ wombs, they don’t have a voice to speak for themselves, so we have to stand up and speak for them.”