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House Passes Climate Change Bill

On Friday, June 26, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed landmark climate change legislation, the "American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009" (H.R. 2454), by a vote of 219 to 212. The bill seeks to cap emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming and also to transform the energy sector. In an action alert, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) supports the measures in the bill that:

- Ensure that low-income individuals and families in the U.S. are not disproportionately affected by any potential rise in energy prices resulting from the legislation;
- Assist not-for-profit, community, and faith-based institutions including houses of worship to become more energy efficient; and
- Put in place mechanisms to provide adaptation assistance for poor and vulnerable populations internationally.

The vote comes after months of negotiations. The Obama Administration has been pushing for the passage of this bill, meeting privately last week with legislators who were undecided. Both sides of the aisle were divided on the issue with 44 Democrats voting against the bill and 8 Republicans supporting it. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, Senate leadership is already working with moderate Democrats to craft compromise language. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, plans to start marking up the bill after the Fourth of July recess.

Click [here](#) for USCCB's positions on climate change.

For more information, please contact Ryan Smith, Policy Analyst at rsmith@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

President Launches a Policy Discussion on Immigration Reform

On June 25, President Obama convened a meeting with Vice President Biden, key cabinet members, and [select bipartisan Congressional Members](#) to discuss immigration reform.

According to *Congressional Quarterly*, President Obama told lawmakers that he wanted to have comprehensive immigration legislation signed into law during the 111th Congress and that Members present at the meeting said he is was willing to commit his own political capital to achieve that goal. In addition, various sources report that:

- The President set a timeline for action on comprehensive immigration reform for late 2009/early 2010;
- President Obama stated that sending back the 12 million undocumented immigrants already in the country is not an option;
- The President's main focus was bipartisan unification and preparedness to move forward telling Republicans they need to stand up to demagogues in their party and Democrats that they need to stand up to people who demand too much;
- Both chambers of Congress need to be fully engaged since there is a possibility of bills moving through the House and Senate simultaneously; and
- Senator McCain expressed willingness to support President Obama and move forward with reform.

The President noted at the meeting that "American people still don't have enough confidence that Congress and any administration is going to get serious about border security, and so they're concerned that any immigration reform simply will be a short-term legalization of undocumented workers with no long-term solution with respect to future flows of illegal immigration." One day prior to the meeting, Senate Judiciary Immigration, Refugees and Border Security Subcommittee Chair, Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY), spoke at the 6th Annual Immigration Law and Policy Conference. He told the group that public sentiment about the immigration overhaul that failed in the Senate two years ago was that it "was too soft on illegal immigrants" and that "unless we can convince Americans we're going to be really tough, then this is not going to work." During this session, Senator Schumer outlined seven principles as a framework for comprehensive reform legislation. These principles include tough enforcement measures like border control and an employment verification system, as well as a pathway to citizenship and family reunification. He stated that "all of the fundamental building blocks are in place to pass comprehensive immigration reform this session and even, possibly, later this year." To review Senator Schumer's remarks at the MPI/CLINIC conference, please [click here](#).

Following the meeting, the President stated that the Administration is fully behind an effort to achieve comprehensive immigration reform and asked the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Janet Napolitano, to lead a workgroup to systematically work through the issues. He also announced that, in the next 90 days, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) would launch a vastly improved website to allow applicants to get updates on the status of their applications via e-mail and text message online for the first time ever. To view the President's comments following the meeting, please [click here](#).

Catholic Charities USA applauds the immigration meeting and calls on the President and Congress to show leadership to find agreement on a comprehensive immigration reform bill by the end of 2009. Please click here to review the [press release](#). For Catholic Charities USA's view on immigration, please [click here](#).

To review the statement of His Eminence Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago and President, USCCB, please [click here](#).

For more information, contact Lucreda Cobbs, Senior Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement, lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Committees Look to Resume Work on Health Care after Recess

Last week, the five Congressional Committees of jurisdiction continued work on legislation to overhaul the health care system. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and Labor held hearings on their [joint draft health care reform bill](#). The three Committees are expected to mark up the bill after the Fourth of July recess and strive to have a bill on the floor before the August recess.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) continued to mark up its draft bill, the "[Affordable Health Choices Act](#)," last week. However, the bill still lacks language for certain provisions such as a public plan option. Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) said he expects to release more specific language to the Committee over the Fourth of July recess. The Committee will resume its markup after the recess, with the intention of working with the Senate Finance Committee to bring a bill to the floor before the August recess.

The Senate Finance Committee continued to negotiate behind the scenes. Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) says he has developed policy to pay for legislation that would cost less than \$1 trillion over 10 years. Senator Baucus has been working with the Committee and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to limit the bill's price tag to \$1 trillion or less. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, the bill would be partially offset by taxing some employer-sponsored health benefits. The Committee is expected to release a detailed proposal soon, though it has not committed to a timeline for a markup.

Catholic Charities USA will continue to keep you updated on the health care reform debate.

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst, kmcclain@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Are your Volunteer Jobs Registered?

The web site www.serve.gov was launched as part of the new volunteer initiative of the First Lady and the Corporation for Community and National Service. Registering events and volunteer opportunities is a way to get more people engaged in the work of Catholic Charities.

Over the summer, the President, the First Lady, the Vice President, Mrs. Biden, and all the Cabinet members have been asked that as they travel across the country, they visit volunteer activities that are registered on the webpage. To register an event or to find an opportunity to volunteer, please visit www.serve.gov.

For more information, please contact Monica Maggiano, Director, Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America, mmaggiano@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

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