

The Respect Life Committee Presents:

Health Care, Politicians and the Catholic Conscience:

The attempt of some legislators to impose mandatory support of abortion on taxpayers is illogical

by Knights of Columbus' Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson

A troubling new development has appeared in American politics. For decades, Americans have been subjected to the arguments of certain Catholic politicians who argued that while “personally opposed” to unjust policies like abortion, they were nonetheless unwilling to “impose” that view on the rest of the country. This argument is disingenuous, premised on the fact that somehow a Catholic conscience has to be put aside in the public square.

Now, the very people who argued that they couldn't bring their private conscience into a secular public square are poised to use the law to impose a particular view on others. By working and voting to include abortion coverage in health care legislation, several Catholic politicians stand to be the deciding votes in forcing their fellow Catholics to fund abortion through tax dollars.

While professing that they cannot impose their consciences on anyone else, these politicians seem to have little hesitation about imposing an immoral political view - one they claim to oppose in principle - on the consciences of Catholic citizens.

Catholic politicians willing to forsake their consciences have come a long way from the legacy of the highest profile Catholic statesman in U.S. history, fellow Knight John F. Kennedy, who while discussing his role as a Catholic and candidate for president said: “If the time should ever come - and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible - when my office would require me to either violate my

conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.”

While some might consider that Catholic politicians have disagreed with the public policy recommendations of their bishops in a variety of areas, the key point is this: many issues are prudential and open to reasonable disagreement, but the inalienable right to life in the context of abortion is not - it is fundamental and it may not be compromised.

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger - now Pope Benedict XVI - noted about Catholic politicians in 2004: “Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion.”

He continued: “While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion.”

Catholic politicians must now consider the effect of national legislation mandating Catholic cooperation in abortion. In his famous pro-life encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II wrote: “The passing of unjust laws often raises difficult problems of conscience for morally upright

people with regard to the issue of cooperation, since they have a right to demand not to be forced to take part in morally evil actions.”

He said further: “Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it.” (74).

It is doubly ironic that a law that would force millions to violate their conscience by paying their taxes - and would entangle thousands of Catholic physicians, nurses, hospitals and charities in the evil of abortion - is being considered at precisely a time when the majority of Americans, in greater and greater numbers, identify themselves as pro-life.

Catholic public officials in Washington have the power to prevent this moral tragedy from happening. They should not hesitate to do so.

Vivat Jesus!

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