

Archbishop Myers, U.S. bishops cite 'fundamental flaws' in ACA

NEWARK and WASHINGTON— Archbishop John J. Myers issued a statement immediately following the June 28 decision by the Supreme Court on the Affordable Care Act (ACA), saying he, along with his fellow bishops of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), share “a profound disappointment over the Supreme Court’s decision upholding as a tax the provision of the ACA that requires individuals to purchase a health plan—the so-called individual mandate.”

Separately, the USCCB also released a statement on the ACA, a contentious issue that will be in the spotlight during the upcoming presidential debates.

Archbishop Myers said he concurred with the statement by the USCCB that, for nearly a century, “the Catholic bishops of the United States have been and continue to be consistent advocates for comprehensive healthcare reform to ensure access to life-affirming healthcare for all, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.”

The USCCB did not join in efforts to repeal the ACA in its entirety. According to the U.S. bishops, last month’s Supreme Court decision “neither diminishes the moral imperative to ensure decent healthcare for all, nor eliminates the need to correct the fundamental flaws in the legislation.”

In its statement, the USCCB said it opposed final passage of ACA because it allows the use of federal funds to pay for elective abortions and for plans that cover such abortions, contradicting longstanding federal policy. “The risk identified in this area has already materialized, particularly in the approval by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) of high-risk insurance pools that would have covered abortion,” the USCCB said.

The USCCB statement went on to point out the ACA “fails to include necessary language to provide essential conscience protection, both within and beyond the abortion context. The lack of statutory conscience protections applicable to ACA’s new mandates has been illustrated in dramatic fashion by HHS’s “preventive-services” mandate, which forces religious and other employers to cover sterilization and contraception, including abortifacient drugs.

In addition, the ACA “fails to treat undocumented immigrant workers and their families fairly,” the U.S. bishops said. “ACA leaves them worse off by not allowing them to purchase health coverage in the new exchanges created under the law, even if they use their own money. This undermines the ACA’s stated goal of promoting access to basic life-affirming healthcare for everyone, especially for those most in need.”

Earlier this year the USCCB spoke out against the HHS’s preventive- services mandate (see *The Catholic Advocate*, March 7 and Feb. 22). On Feb. 28, Bishop William E. Lori, chair of the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, testified on the HHS mandate and the ACA before the House of Representatives’ Judiciary Committee.

Bishop Lori said the HHS mandate would allow the government to force a religious body to violate its beliefs. “I emphasize this word—‘force’—precisely because it is one of the key differences between a mere dispute over reproductive health policy and a dispute over religious freedom,” he said. “This is not a matter of whether contraception may be prohibited by the government. This is not even a matter of whether contraception may be supported by the government. Instead, it is a matter of whether religious people and institutions may be forced by the government to provide coverage for contraception or sterilization, even if that violates their religious beliefs.”



Advocate photo – Ward Mele
Following last month’s long-awaited Supreme Court ruling, Archbishop John J. Myers joined in the USCCB’s call for Americans to urge Congress to pass, and the Obama Administration to sign, legislation to fix serious flaws in the Affordable Care Act.