

Hatch Life Amendment Gets Push from Bishops

Washington (RNS) — Representatives of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops came before a Senate subcommittee to support a "states' rights" anti-abortion amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Archbishop John R. Roach of Minneapolis, president of the NCCB, and Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York were among religious leaders who presented their views to Sen. Orrin G. Hatch's Subcommittee on the Constitution.

The Catholic leaders told the Utah Republican, sponsor of the amendment they favor, that they intend to "throw the entire weight of the Catholic Church" behind it.

The Catholic Church always has opposed abortion and supported legislative efforts to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision which legalized it. But the prelates' Senate testimony marked the first time the Church hierarchy has endorsed a specific measure.

Sen. Hatch's so-called "Human Life Federalist" Amendment would allow both Congress and the states to enact legislation against abortion. The stricter law would prevail. It is one of several possible anti-abortion measures being considered by the Senator's subcommittee.

Hard-line abortion foes support the more sweeping "paramount" amendment sponsored by Republicans Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Rep. Henry Hyde of Illinois. It would affirm that the "paramount right to life is vested in each human being from the moment of fertilization, without regard to age, health or condition of dependency." That would have the effect of making abortion murder in the eyes of the law.

Asked why he did not favor the more stringent legislation, Archbishop Roach said that collectively, the bishops had decided that Sen. Hatch's amendment was both an acceptable remedy to the "present situation of abortion



Cardinal Terence Cooke, right, testifies before the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution. In background, Archbishop John R. Roach, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, (RNS)

on demand," and the more "politically feasible" option.

The present access to abortion creates a "kind of cumulative horror that gets to us," and compels the Church to act immediately, the archbishop said.

"We cannot in conscience tolerate the continued destruction of unborn human lives at the rate of 1.5 million a year on the hypothetical grounds that some day another, theoretically ideal constitutional solution might be found."

Hatch's strategy for returning the abortion controversy to the legislative arena "has the great merit of being an achievable solution," he said.

In a rare legislative appearance, Cardinal Cooke, chairman of the NCCB committee for pro-life activities, decried the current state of legalized abortion as "a situation of lawlessness" that reinforces the acceptability of violence, diminishes respect for the dignity of each human being,

and unravels the "moral fiber of the nation."

Furthermore, he said, "the family is in trouble today — serious trouble, and there is no question that the destruction of unborn human life adds to its (the family's) destruction."

Should the subcommittee endorse the Hatch Amendment, the Catholic Church would not stop its efforts to ensure the maximum protection for life under the law, Archbishop Roach said. But, considering the urgency of the crisis, "we stand prepared ... to use all our efforts to urge support (for the amendment) among our people and adoption by the

appropriate legislative bodies."

As the archbishop noted, the subcommittee's endorsement of the measure would be only the first step in a long legislative battle. To become law, the amendment would need the approval of two-thirds of both the House and Senate and of a majority of state legislatures. Should the amendment be ratified, another series of legislative battles would ensue, both over statewide restrictions on abortion and in Congress.

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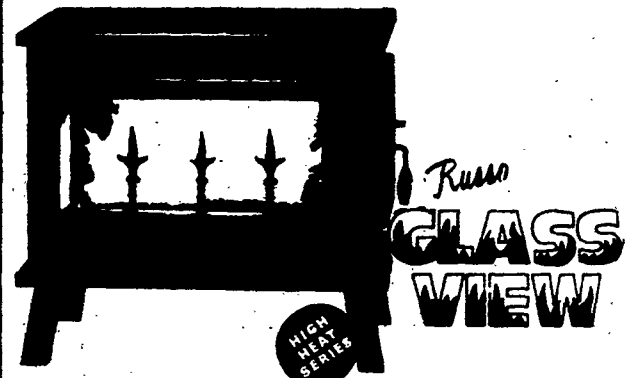
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