

House votes for abortion funding

By Liz Schevtchuk
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The House of Representatives voted 216-206 Oct. 11 to resume federal funding of abortions in rape and incest cases, a decision disappointing pro-lifers and delighting abortion rights backers.

The House vote came during action on a \$156.7 billion fiscal 1990 Health and Human Services and Labor spending bill, the type of legislation which previously has included the Hyde amendment, banning federal Medicaid funding of abortion except in cases where the woman's life is endangered.

Overtaking an eight-year prohibition on rape-incest abortion funding, the House decided to adopt the Senate provision allowing abortion funding in cases of rape and incest as well as when the woman's life is endangered.

Medicaid is the federally funded and state-administered health care program for poor Americans.

"I am seriously concerned about the House vote on the Hyde amendment," said Vincentian Father John W. Gouldrick, director of the National Conference of Cath-

olic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, in a statement Oct. 12.

"There's a need for all of us, especially legislators, to step back and ask if by our decisions we are making America more just and more civilized. I don't see how laws facilitating the killing of offspring contribute to either of these objectives," the priest said.

In the late 1970s, the Hyde amendment, named for Rep. Henry J. Hyde, R-Ill., allowed Medicaid abortions for pregnancies resulting from rape and incest, but the rape and incest exceptions later were eliminated.

"Rape and incest is a tragedy. I bleed for women who are raped and who are victims of incest," Hyde told his House colleagues during debate. "Why visit on the second victim, the unborn child that is the product of that criminal act, capital punishment?"

Rep. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., asked her House colleagues to "for the sake of compassion, at least allow the females of this nation to decide for themselves along with their God" what to do about a pregnancy from rape or incest. She said that in tallying likely votes for their camp, she and her supporters had considered "anything over

200 a moral victory. And we won a real victory."

Hyde attributed defeat of the stronger restriction to a change in the House composition, with more members now supportive of abortion rights.

In his statement Father Gouldrick said that "legislators are caught up in the heat and intensity of the abortion debate following the Webster decision," referring to a July Supreme Court ruling that upheld a Missouri abortion restriction law. "They are only hearing from one side on this issue."

"The other side is mobilized. They're like sharks with red meat dangling in front of them. They are aggressive," added Laurie Anne Ramsey, education director for Americans United for Life, a Chicago-based pro-life law firm. "But I think theirs is a campaign based on negativism. They're using last-resort tactics, and I don't think they can sustain it."

Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice said she was surprised at the momentum in the House.

"That (vote) is for us the most heartfelt of the victories," she said.



AP Wide World Photo
Pope John Paul II waves to the thousands who gathered for an open-air Mass at Maumere's soccer stadium Wednesday, Oct. 11, during the pope's six-day tour of Indonesia.

Cuomo answers Catholic press criticisms on abortion

By Catholic News Service

ALBANY, N.Y. — Stung by criticism from the Catholic press regarding recent comments on abortion, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo has written to Catholic newspapers in his state stressing that "my position (on abortion) has not changed."

In the letter, Cuomo said he was "well aware" from thousands of letters he has received since he spoke at the University of Notre Dame in 1984 "that some Catholics do not find my position an acceptable one."

"It is, nonetheless, my position now, as it was then," he wrote.

The controversy began with comments Cuomo made in a question-answer session following a speech he gave Sept. 9 in Tucson, Ariz. He said abortion "must be a

matter of the woman's conscience," adding that it was "presumptuous" for a man to make judgments on abortion.

"I feel absurd," he said. "Like I don't know why the judgment is mine. Or (that of) an all-male court, except for one woman, or a mostly male Congress."

A spokesman for the governor said the comments represented "nothing new" and were "no different" from those he made in 1984 during a major speech on abortion and public policy at the University of Notre Dame.

Catholic New York disagreed. It said in an editorial Sept. 21 that on the occasion of the Notre Dame talk, its reporter asked Cuomo whether he was "pro-choice" and he "ducked the question" by saying it was too simplistic a question for such a compli-

cated issue.

"Well, it took a while, but Cuomo finally gave his answer," the paper said.

"A vital moral issue is at stake ... It cannot be disposed of by giving each person the ability to choose," Catholic New York said.

Cuomo complained in his letter that the news and editorial coverage of his Tucson remarks created the "overall" impression "that I had changed my position on abortion" since his Notre Dame speech.

"That is not the case," he said. "In Tucson I did not deliver a speech about some new position on abortion. My posi-

tion has not changed."

He said his comments about "my growing uncomfortableness with having to make decisions about abortion" did not mean that he felt "incapable" of making such decisions.

In his Notre Dame speech, which played a prominent role in that election year's national debate over Catholic teaching on abortion and the proper role of Catholics in public office, Cuomo argued that "to assure our (Catholic) freedom we must allow others the same freedom, even if occasionally it produces conduct by them which we would hold to be sinful."



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