

Alinskyian organizing linked to abortion movement

The Catholic Church is a supporter of Alinskyian community organizing. Why?

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If you happen to be in a congregation that's part of an Alinskyian community organization – an increasingly common phenomena under the Obama administration (coincidence? I don't think so) – there will be "house meetings."

The organizer running the show will attendees what concerns they have for their neighborhood. They're looking for specific answers: unemployment, lack of adequate healthcare insurance, school issues...something like that.

Every once and a while, the organizer will get someone in the crowd who wants to do something about abortion. He will be told, "that's too divisive an issue. We only get involved with issues we can all agree on."

Universal healthcare – we all agree on universal healthcare, regardless of abortion provisions buried within them. Right? Well, that's what the Alinskyian community organizing networks contend.

There are several primary Alinskyian community organizing networks across the country. The PICO National Network, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gamaliel, and DART are the four largest organizing among religious congregations.

The PICO National Network – PICO, for short – has been the most aggressively active in touting health care issues with abortion components. In California, PICO successfully pushed the state legislature to fund a mobile medical van providing school-based health care and Planned Parenthood referrals. Furthermore, some California PICO congregations are sites for Healthy Families, providing elective abortion and family planning coverage.

Their latest efforts are directed toward support of national health "reform." To this end, PICO and several other organizations will be running a TV ad campaign – one under the moniker of "People of Faith for Health Reform" – organizing nationwide prayer events, and recommending a "health care sermon weekend." "The message, said PICO spokesman Gordon Whitman, is this: 'Religious voters support health-care reform, and you can't take them for granted. We're not going to allow people who stand up for health reform to be attacked on religious grounds. If you are in a district or state that is culturally conservative, there is support for health reform.' In August, paid organizers will meet with pastors to help them organize their congregations, develop talking points for meetings with members of Congress and coordinate with other groups and individuals -- religious and secular." [PICO National Network, "Pulling Together on Health Care," Washington Post, July 25, 2009]

Abortion provisions are no obstacle to PICO's support for healthcare reform. "To hold together their diverse memberships," the above PICO statement continues, "the coalitions

are moving carefully around controversial issues. For example... PICO [is] supporting the 'status quo' on abortion – neither requiring nor banning insurers from covering the procedure as long as federal funds are not used.”

The Gamaliel Network has also been pushing health care. Its website carries the gleeful information: “Barack H. Obama, former GAMALIEL ORGANIZER is the 44th President of the United States!” and announces that on June 22-25, 2009, it bussed in hundreds of clergy and leaders from across the country to Washington DC for visits to congressional representatives to discuss health care. “The Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus is leading Gamaliel's newest national issue: Health Care. They invite you and your spiritual community to discuss and then act on their latest theological statement.”

Gamaliel is part of the Health Care for America Now coalition that includes several other Alinskyian organizing networks, such as ACORN, as well as some pro-abortion groups like the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and Planned Parenthood Federation of America. And DART – the Direct Action and Research Training Center – website claims that its local affiliates have won accessible health care reform in several major metropolitan cities.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), as a national body, has kept a lower profile on its support of universal health care than the other Alinskyian networks. However, it is among the “allies” of Jobs with Justice, a project of another Alinskyian network, Interfaith Worker Justice. Jobs with Justice runs a national “Health Care for All” campaign, which means the IAF also supports universal health care, with its abortion-friendly elements.

Several IAF affiliates, on the other hand, are right in the middle of the health care fracas. United Power for Action and Justice, a Chicago monster-organization with hundreds of institutional members, has been fighting for universal healthcare in Illinois. “Because of a relationship that was built with Illinois Governor Rod Blagoiavich, UPAJ was in a good position to work with him to achieve affordable, quality healthcare for all Illinois residents,” writes Lynn Wax, an UPAJ leader. [“Making a Difference on Healthcare,” Prophetic Voices, Jewish Funds for Justice newsletter, Summer 2007.]

BUILD, the IAF local of Baltimore, is part of Health Care for All coalition pushing for universal health care in Maryland, organized specifically to support Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative...which is, in turn, part of the abortion-inclusive Health Care for America Now coalition.

For Catholics, there's a particular irony to all this. The Catholic Church is a tremendous supporter of Alinskyian community organizing. Its multi-million dollar annual collection gives the various networks a sizeable percentage of its grants. Hundreds of Catholic congregations are members of the various local affiliates, paying dues and sending parishioners for training in Alinskyian “civic education.”

On the other hand, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops says it “is working to ensure that needed health reform is not undermined by abandoning longstanding and widely supported policies against abortion funding and mandates and in favor of conscience protection.” [USCCB News Release, “Cardinal Rigali Urges House Committee to Support Pro-Life Amendments to Health Care Reform Bill,” July 30, 2009]

What's wrong with this picture?

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