

Obama asks church help to debunk health-care 'lies' An unusual appeal: An unusual appeal

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Facing incendiary charges that health-care reform would result in government financing of abortion and euthanasia, President Obama has made an unusual appeal to religious groups to help sell the plan and debunk critics' "false witness."

"I'm going to need the help of all of you," Obama told an August 19 conference call and live webcast that attracted an estimated 140,000 people. "I need you to knock on doors, talk to your neighbors. I need you to spread the facts and speak the truth."

The "40 Minutes for Health Reform" call, organized by the Washington-based group Faith in Public Life and supported by 32 religious organizations, was part of a campaign to get clergy and congregants actively involved in promoting health-care reform.

The president used the call to decry what he called "misinformation" and "divisive and deceptive attacks" in the ongoing debate. "There are some folks out there who are, frankly, bearing false witness," he said.

Obama called the idea that the legislation would include "death panels" to determine whether elderly patients live or die "an extraordinary lie." He said it was "not true" that the plans represent a "government takeover of health care" or "mean government funding of abortion."

"These are all fabrications that have been put out there in order to discourage people from meeting what I consider to be a core ethical and moral obligation, and that is that we look out for one another, that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper," he said.

At the same time, conservative groups, including some leading Christian activists, ramped up their continued opposition to the reform package, which they also insist

could ultimately lead to rationing of care for the elderly.

Just two hours before Obama's call, Tony Perkins, president of Family Research Council Action, unveiled an ad saying that money that could be used for surgery for the elderly would instead pay for abortions. The tag line is: "Our greatest generation denied care. Our future generation denied life."

Perkins said that there was a lot of "gnashing of teeth" over an earlier ad produced by his group, but he stood by its claims. He said his organization had worked to amend the proposed legislation to ensure that taxpayer-funded abortions would not be included. The amendments "were all voted down, primarily on party lines," he said.

Despite denials by the president, a new poll indicates that a significant percentage of Americans believe that the health-care plan is likely to permit use of federal funds for abortions.

An NBC News poll released August 18 showed that 50 percent of respondents said it was likely that taxpayer dollars will be used to pay for women to have abortions; 37 percent thought it was unlikely and 13 percent were not sure. Asked if the government would "make decisions about when to stop providing medical care to the elderly," 45 percent said it was likely, compared to 50 percent who said it was unlikely and 5 percent who were not sure. -RNS