Bioethics Public Policy Report
March 11, 2021

National

- Both the US House of Representatives and Senate have passed the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan which Joe Biden is expected to sign on March 12th. No Republican representative or senator voted for the bill. Although touted as a COVID-19 relief measure, actual public health spending on COVID-19 is less an 10% of the bill. Among its provisions, the bill bails out local and state governments as well as bankrupt pension plans. It spends $170 billion on education, despite the fact that $50 billion from previous bills has not yet been paid. In addition, the bill contains no Hyde Amendment protections—taxpayer dollars will fund abortion—and it reverses the Trump Administration rule that Title X funds cannot go to abortion providers. For more information, click here, here, and here.

- On February 27th, US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine. Johnson & Johnson used the abortion derived cell line PER.C6 in the design, development, and testing of the vaccine, and it continues to use the cell line in ongoing production.

- On March 8th, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidance for people who have received a COVID-19 vaccine. The guidance is for people considered to be “fully vaccinated” which is defined as two weeks after receiving the second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, or two weeks after receiving the single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

- Planned Parenthood has released its 2019–2020 annual report. Here are some lowlights of the organization’s activities from October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. It performed 354,871 abortions, up from 345,672 the previous year; 542,659 breast screenings and pap tests, down from 566,186 the previous year; 208,248 well woman exams, down from 213,042 the previous year; and 2,667 adoption referrals, a decline from 4,279 the previous year. Financially, it reported more than $2 billion in net assets, up from $1.9 billion the previous year; $618.1 million in government funding, an increase of $616.8 million over the previous year; $510 million in private funding, down from $591.3 million; and 590,000 active individual contributors, a decrease from the 1.1 million reported the previous year. Planned Parenthood also reported it has over 200 “health centers” in 31 states that provide hormones for people seeking to “transition” their sex. The full report is available here. For an additional perspective, click here.
• Bethany Christian Services, the largest Evangelical Protestant adoption and foster care agency in the US, has changed policy and will now place children with adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender queer.

State by State
• On March 9th, Governor Asa Hutchinson signed into law SB 6, the “Arkansas Unborn Child Protection Act” which criminalizes abortion at all stages of pregnancy except when the life of the mother is at risk. The bill passed the state senate 27–7 and the state house 76–19. The act is described as a “direct frontal assault” on Roe v. Wade.

Federal Courts
• On February 26th, the US Supreme Court instructed Santa Clara County in California to allow churches and other houses of worship to reopen to twenty-five percent capacity in accord with its ruling in South Bay United Pentecostal Church v. Newsom. Justices Breyer, Kagan, and Sotomayor dissented.

International
• Euthanasia and assisted suicide are legal in Canada, however it is the patient, not the clinician, who is supposed to raise the issue. A Vancouver Catholic newspaper is investigating whether public health authorities are unilaterally offering the practices after a seriously ill women claimed she was “pestered [and] pressured” by medical staff to consider assisted suicide.
• The lower house of the Tasmanian Parliament has passed the so-called End-of-Life Choices bill which legalizes euthanasia. The bill is expected to easily pass the upper house and come into effect in mid 2022.

NCBC Media Resources
• NCBC President Joseph Meaney discusses ethical challenges with COVID-19 vaccines on EWTN’s News Nightly
• Joseph Meany interviewed by Crux on Johnson & Johnson’s COVID-19 vaccine.
• Fr. Tad Pacholczyk talks Johnson & Johnson vaccines on Relevant Radio’s Drew Mariani Show (start at 14:15)
• Bioethics on Air podcast #56: Strengthening Mission in Catholic Health Care with Jim Spencer
• Bioethics on Air podcast #57: Combatting Human Trafficking with Deborah O’Hara-Rusckowski

Of Note
• “This isn’t a rescue bill. It isn’t a relief bill. It’s a laundry list of left-wing priorities that predate the pandemic and do not meet the needs of American families.” – House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), speaking about the Democrat’s COVID-19 relief bill.
• "I will continue to abide by the same principle that has guided me throughout my 21 years in the Senate: those of us who are opposed to abortion should not be compelled to pay for them. As you may know, I have consistently—on no fewer than 50 occasions—voted against federal funding of abortions ... (T)he government should not tell those with strong
convictions against abortion, such as you and I, that we must pay for them." –Then Senator Joe Biden, from a 1994 letter to a Delaware constituent.

- "What any religious tradition describes as God’s will is no concern of this Congress." US House of Representatives member Jerry Nadler (D-NY) responding to a colleague’s address to the body saying the so-called Equality Act violates Scripture.

Sharing the News: If you have public policy news that you would like to share with the NCBC, or if you have colleagues who would like to receive the Bioethics Public Policy Report, please contact Joe Zalot at 215-871-2014 or jzalot@ncbcenter.org. Previous editions of this report are available through the Public Policy page of the NCBC website.

Sharing the Resources: If you enjoy receiving the Bioethics Public Policy Report and would like to support its continued publication, please consider making a donation to the NCBC.

The National Catholic Bioethics Center webpage, available at http://www.ncbcenter.org/, is a significant resource for bioethics information. NCBC bioethicists are also on-call for consultation twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week, at 215-877-2660.