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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CATHOLICS, BAPTISTS LAMENT FAILURE TO PROTECT ABORTION AMENDMENT
WASHINGTON--Spokespersons for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) jointly lamented the refusal by Rep. Bill Natcher (D-KY) to go the Rules Committee in the House of Representatives to protect his abortion funding amendment to the Labor/Health and Human Services bill. Congressman Natcher's decision means that his amendment will be stripped from the bill and not voted upon by the full House.

Commenting on Rep. Natcher's decision were Helen Alvaré, Director of Planning and Information for the Pro-Life Secretariat of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ken Dupre, Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, and James A. Smith, Director of Government Relations of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

As currently written, the Labor/HHS bill requires taxpayers in the 50 states to subsidize abortion on demand in the Medicaid program. Last week Rep. Natcher offered an amendment to the bill under which only 1% of all Medicaid abortions would be subsidized, as opposed to 100% under President Clinton's plan.

Rep. Natcher's amendment restricting abortion funding was overwhelmingly accepted by the House Appropriations Committee. It was also widely praised by pro-life spokespersons who said they welcomed an opportunity for the full House to vote on abortion funding restrictions. But that vote may not take place.

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Without the Natcher amendment, the bill requires taxpayers to spend about \$70 million for 450,000 abortions a year.

These figures were derived from a Congressional Research Service analysis, according to Ms. Alvaré, who noted that Rep. Natcher's constituents in the second district of Kentucky do not favor federally funded abortion on demand.

"In fact," according to Mr. Dupre, "pastors of 76 Catholic parishes, as well as Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly of Louisville and Bishop John C. McRaith of Owensboro, and 56 Baptist ministers, including the President of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, have signed letters specifically requesting the Congressman to protect his own amendment by going to the Rules Committee to ensure that the full house has a chance to debate and vote on this issue."

Mr. Smith said the Southern Baptist Convention has joined with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in requesting the Congressman to reconsider his decision because there is no valid reason to force Americans opposed to abortion to pay \$70 million for 450,000 abortions each year.

"I am deeply saddened by Representative Natcher's decision to permit this to happen," Mr. Smith said. "Southern Baptists are overwhelmingly opposed to taxpayer-funded abortion on demand."

The Christian Life Commission is the Ethics and Public Policy Agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with 15.4 million members in 38,400 congregations nationwide.

The Catholic Conference of Kentucky is the organization representing all four of the Catholic dioceses of Kentucky.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is the organization of the more than 300 Catholic bishops in 188 dioceses in the United States. The Catholic Church is the largest religious denomination in the United States with almost 60 million adherents in 20,000 parishes throughout the country.

NOTE: For further information, please contact Ken Dupre, Kentucky Catholic Conference, 502-875-4345.

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