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### November 8, 2009: The Role of Religion in Building Coalitions Over Healthcare

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Title: The Role of Religion in Building Coalitions Over Healthcare

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11/8/2009—The House of Representatives passed its version of healthcare reform yesterday. Hopefully the Senate will do the same in due course. I haven't been following the legislative changes in detail, but the final version was sufficiently neutral on abortion that Democrats for Life felt able to support the bill, which could not have passed without their votes (of course it could not have passed without any of the votes it got; it was a close call). Here is part of the statement by Executive Director Kristen Day: "Democrats For Life of America applauds Speaker Nancy Pelosi for agreeing to clear the way for the passage of this historic legislation. But we would be remiss if we didn't thank Congressmen Bart Stupak and Brad Ellsworth for their heroic efforts to fight for the amendment that removed tax payer funded abortions from the final bill." I mention this not as a point about abortion. I am pro-life, but let's face it, few secularists are and I expect pro-choice voters to feel quite double-crossed by the final healthcare bill (Ironically, if even a few pro-choice Republicans had supported the bill, Pelosi would certainly have sacrificed pro-life Democrats and defeated the Stupak amendment). My point is a different one. Opposition to healthcare reform has revived the conservative Christian coalition that supported President Bush and that had splintered over economic issues during the Great Recession. If healthcare is abortion neutral, then their opposition is not really based on abortion, though they may still maintain that it is. Then what is it based on? On the Protestant side at least, judging from World Magazine, it is based on opposition to the government's role in healthcare. Somehow the private market has become a theological goal of many Conservative Christians. This is genuinely odd. The early church was a communist community. The tradition of Christian Socialism is an old and honorable one. Karl Barth, the twentieth century's greatest Christian theologian, was a Christian socialist. Pope Benedict's encyclical Caritas in Veritate, Charity in Truth, which was issued in June 2009, was the most radical critique of global capitalism seen in many years. This is a theological issue within American Christianity. The religious left has not challenged the pro-market orientation of conservative Christianity here. The rest of us are not in a great position to do so. Nevertheless, this is a pressing need. The unholy alliance of the Church and corporate interests has to be broken before a broad-based progressive coalition can be built. That coalition will need people who "cling to guns or religion" as President Obama once put it.