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03/28/2000 05:56:43 PM

Record Type: Record

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cc:

Subject: Holy See Campaign

Ann, Heather & Lauren --

Just wanted to make sure you all had the background information regarding Catholics for a Free Choice's (CFFC), "See Change" campaign. The "See Change" campaign was initiated by CFFC in March, 1999 to request a review of the Holy See's status as a Non-member State Permanent Observer at the United Nations. It does not seek to expel the Holy See. Rather, the campaign only seeks to focus international public attention on the unique "state" status held by the Roman Catholic church at the UN.

In reaction to the campaign, in February conservative members of Congress, led by Chris Smith in the House and Bob Smith in the Senate, introduced resolutions commending the Holy See for its contributions to the UN and "objecting to efforts to expel the Holy See from the United Nations." These resolutions misconstrue and misstate many aspects of the "See Change" campaign.

Over the last few weeks, the Republican House Leadership has been considering bringing Chris Smith's Holy See Resolution (H.Con.Res.253) to the floor for a vote. (Obviously Republicans see this Resolution as an opportunity to counter charges that they are "anti-Catholic," stemming from Bob Jones and the House Chaplain problems.) Additionally, Jim Nicholson, Chairman of the RNC, has issued several press statements on this issue, including the following from March 15: "Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson today demanded Al Gore repudiate two anti-Catholic groups that are calling for the eviction of the Vatican from the United Nations - The National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and the Women Leaders Online. NARAL has enthusiastically endorsed Gore for president. Also, current and former Democrat members of Congress who have endorsed Gore are on the advisory board of the Women Leaders Online."

The Congressional Resolutions are laden with anti-choice language and condemn the broad based "See Change" campaign to adjust the Vatican's status at the United Nations. It is relevant to note here that NARAL, Republicans For Choice, and 450 other world-wide organizations, support this campaign and contrary to Resolution sponsors' rhetoric, it is not an effort to oust the Vatican from its permanent observer status, only to correct its present designation as a "state."

For both reasons of the Resolutions' anti-choice language and their

condemnation of the "See Change" campaign, we have been working with Gephardt's office to try and keep this Resolution from ever getting to the House floor, and to keep this campaign from getting wrapped up in the larger politics around courting the Catholic vote. However, if we are unsuccessful in this endeavor, it is our impression that the Democrats will simply support the resolution and rob Republicans of any political potency. In fact, Democrats would probably even use the floor time to discuss the Republicans' Chaplain and Bob Jones problems.

Following are talking points on the "See Change" campaign that you should feel free to share within the Administration.

The See Change campaign is not an effort to evict the Vatican from the United Nations. It is an attempt to get the UN to review the special and uniquely influential status it affords the Roman Catholic Church. Currently the Roman Catholic Church holds the status of Nonmember State Permanent Observer, a status shared only by the country of Switzerland. No other religion is recognized as a state in the UN. The See Change campaign asserts that the Roman Catholic Church is not a country or state and should not be entitled to Nonmember State Permanent Observer status. Perhaps the more appropriate designation is Permanent Observer NGO.

The See Change campaign is not anti-Catholic. It is sponsored by the nation's premiere Catholic reproductive rights organization, Catholics For Free Choice, an organization comprised of and run by Catholics. Moreover, there are many Catholic groups among those supporting the campaign.

There are over 450 NGOs worldwide who have signed onto the See Change campaign. These organizations include human rights, environmental, public health, and reproductive rights organizations.

Pro-choice groups that support the See Change campaign are in line with their organizations' missions and goals. Reproductive rights groups support the right of women everywhere to make their own reproductive health decisions, including decisions about contraception, family planning, and sexuality education. Pro-choice groups also believe that the UN should be actively promoting reproductive health programs that improve the lives and health of women and their families worldwide, programs often opposed by the Roman Catholic Church. (The Vatican's "state" designation at the U.N. is especially valuable because the U.N. prefers achieving consensus over holding votes, especially in conferences. This practice gives states with minority views a disproportionate voice in the United Nations.)

Pro-choice Americans must reject attempts to use the See Change campaign as a political weapon, in Congress or on the campaign trail.

March 28, 2000

MEMORANDUM

Today, Joe Lockhart was asked the following question:

Q Joe, does the President agree with the National Abortion Rights Action League in their effort to get the United Nations to revoke the Vatican's observer status? If he does agree with it, does he think we ought to withdraw our ambassador to the Vatican?

MR. LOCKHART: I've never heard him discuss the first issue, and I have no reason to believe we'll be withdrawing our ambassador.

Background

The question is referring to the Catholics for a Free Choice's "See Change" campaign, initiated in March 1999 to request a review of the Holy See's status as a Non-Member State Permanent Observer at the United Nations. According to NARAL, it does not seek to expel the Holy See. Rather, the campaign seeks to focus international public attention on the unique "state" status held by the Vatican at the UN. Basically, NARAL and 450 other world-wide organizations, including Republicans for Choice, want to correct the Holy See's designation as a state. The See Change campaign asserts that the Roman Catholic Church is not a country or state and should not be entitled to Nonmember State Permanent Observer status – which, they believe, gives its views a disproportionate voice in the UN to oppose reproductive health programs. They believe perhaps a more appropriate designation would be Permanent Observer NGO.

Reps. Chris Smith and Bob Smith have introduced resolutions commending the Holy See for its contributions to the UN and "objecting to efforts to expel the Holy See from the United Nations." (The pro-choice groups argue the resolutions misconstrue and misstate many aspects of the "See Change" campaign). Over the last few weeks, the Republican House Leadership has been considering bringing Chris Smith's Holy See Resolution (H.Con.Res. 253) to the floor for a vote. Republicans see this resolution as an opportunity counter charges that they are "anti-Catholic," stemming from the Bob Jones and House Chaplain problems. In addition, Jim Nicholson, Chairman of the RNC, has issued several press statements on this issue, including the following from March 15: "Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson today demanded Al Gore repudiate two anti-Catholic groups that are calling for the eviction of the Vatican from the United Nations – the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and the Women Leaders Online. NARAL has enthusiastically endorsed Gore for president."

Q&A

Republicans see this as an opportunity to turn around the problems they have faced since Bob Jones and the Chaplain controversy. The key is not to get drawn into this. We need to work with NSC to come up with a response in case we're asked again. NARAL has provided Gore's office with background information in case they are asked about it.