

Catholics on the White House radar

Dennis Coday | Mar. 18, 2010 NCR Today

Catholics and health care reform came up during the press corps briefing by White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs today:

Q: Does [the President] still have confidence [the health care reform bill] is going to pass?

MR. GIBBS: The President still believes we will have the votes, yes.

Q: How close are you? Are you within a handful, or a dozen votes? What do you think?

MR. GIBBS: I don't have a number to predict. I think the President, in the calls and the meetings that he's having with individual leaders, is making great progress.

Q: Does the President think that he can still get Representative Stupak's vote?

MR. GIBBS: Well, look, I think over the past 24 hours, we have seen strong indications from those in the Catholic Church that support our belief that the legislation is about health care reform, and that it shouldn't and doesn't change the existing federal law. The Catholic Health Association, the order of nuns support -- I think is very important. I think you saw Congressman Kildee's statement yesterday regarding those developments and how it affected some of his thinking.

So, again, I think the President remains engaged on that issue.

Q: And so that leads into my next question, which is that was very significant what the Catholic -- especially what the nuns said yesterday, and I'm wondering, is the President or anyone else from the White House engaging in outreach to groups like that? Did the President speak with members of the nuns group or the health associations personally?

MR. GIBBS: The President met earlier this week with Sister Keehan of the CHA.

Q: Where was that meeting?

MR. GIBBS: I believe the meeting was in the Roosevelt Room. I don't know if she also made it into the Oval Office as well.

Q: And can you share with us any -- the pitch that he perhaps made to her or --

MR. GIBBS: The only thing that -- I did not get a detailed run-down of what the pitch was that he made. I know he was effusive about her support and about her as a person for making the courageous statements that she has.

Q: And so fair to say, as a result of that meeting and the letter yesterday, that he does have in fact optimism that he could gain the vote even of someone like Bart Stupak?

MR. GIBBS: I think the President again remains very engaged on this in his discussions with members of Congress.

And Gibbs also took notice of a small Catholic publication headquartered in Kansas City, Mo. On his Twitter feed, (<http://twitter.com/pressec>) Gibbs wrote: "Another very important health care development - Editorial: National Catholic Reporter backs health bill <http://bit.ly/csfmHu> [1]"

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