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Catholic Bishops Lobby for DREAM Act

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 17, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Four U.S. bishops - Cardinal Roger Mahony and Coadjutor Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City and Bishop Edward Burns of Juneau, Alaska - just held a press call to urge the U.S. Senate to pass the DREAM Act.

"I ask Senators to do the right thing," Archbishop Gomez said. Cardinal Mahony discussed meeting young students at Los Angeles' many colleges and universities who would be affected by the DREAM Act. "They really consider themselves Americans," the cardinal sais, noting that many of them do not recall the countries of their birth because they were brought here at such a young age.

Bishop Wester said he had been lobbying Utah's two senators, Sen. Orrin Hatch and Sen. Robert Bennett, both of whom have supported the DREAM Act in the past but are facing strong pressure to back the GOP leadership in opposing the bill now. Wester said that the DREAM Act was "an important first step" towards comprehensive immigration reform.

Bishop Burns of Juneau said it was "ironic" that the vote was coming just before Christmas. He recalled that "the Holy Family traveled between countries to do what was best for their child." He compared the DREAM Act to the dream given to St. Joseph, telling him to flee to Egypt to protect the baby Jesus.

I asked the bishops what they made of the contention of Father Robert Sirico, offered on last week's edition of EWTN's "The World Over," that Catholics were free to disagree with the bishops on the issue because it involved prudential judgment. "No issue has received as much positive Church teaching as this issue" Cardinal Mahony replied. He recalled that both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have spoken forcefully on the issue of immigrants' rights, and that the Holy Father addressed the issue specifically several times during his 2008 visit to the United States. "Pope Benedict has been encouraging us on this issue," Mahony said. Bishop Wester also insisted that the bishops have a duty to weigh in on the DREAM Act. "There is a temptation to see it only as a political issue, but it is a human issue and a moral issue," Wester said. He noted that one of the main reasons the bishops have been supportive of the DREAM Act is that it will help to keep families together. Bishop Burns spoke of a young woman he met in Alaska who siblings are citizens, and whose parents have regularized their legal status, but she has been unable to obtain legal status.

Kevin Appleby, Director of the USCCB Office on Migration said that 30,000 messages have been delivered to Congress by Catholic organizations supporting passage of the DREAM Act and that individual bishops had contacted their congressional delegations to urge support for the law.

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