

What Must Obama Say

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 16, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

As President Obama and his debate team get ready for a make-or-break performance tonight, here are some things I would like to hear him say.

Medicare: Governor Romney and Congressman Ryan say the word "entitlement" as if it were a cussword. But, let me be clear. I believe that our senior citizens are entitled to Medicare. After a life of hard work and paying taxes, they don't want to have to negotiate with the insurance companies. They are entitled not to worry about going bankrupt because of a health emergency. They are entitled to Social Security, too. Entitlement is not a bad word, Governor, and I wish you and Congressman Ryan would stop saying it is.

The \$716 billion "cut" to Medicare: Governor Romney says that Obamacare "cut" \$716 billion from Medicare. The truth is that when we were negotiating Obamacare, we said to the insurance companies, "You are getting millions of new customers, so what are you going to put on the table?" And, the insurance companies and health care providers agreed to accept lower reimbursement rates. We then took that money and used it to close the doughnut hole for prescription drug coverage and we eliminated co-pays for preventive services which will make everyone healthier and cut costs for the whole health care system. Where I come from that is called an improvement not a cut.

Taxes: I simply can't see why anyone would think that we should cut the tax rate for the wealthiest Americans another 20%. Governor Romney says he will close some loopholes, and I agree that we should close some loopholes. But, whatever we save from that should go to pay down the deficit. Mr. Romney and I are both doing very well. We don't need another tax cut. What we need and want is a growing economy, and that requires investments in education and technology. That requires shrinking the federal deficit. It doesn't require throwing more money at the 1 percent and hoping they will invest it or spend it in ways that help the rest of us. I am not sure how many people get employed installing an elevator for cars.

Income inequality: You know, over the past several decades, the key economic fact, in good times and bad times, is that the very rich have gotten very, very rich — you might say "severely rich" — and the middle class have not seen their slice of the pie increase at all. I do not begrudge the rich their success. I do not want to punish them for their success. But, we have to level the playing field. The Governor calls that socialism but Social Security is not socialism. Medicare and Medicaid are not socialism. The Dream Act is not socialism. They are the achievements of a humane society, a society that judges itself the way we were warned we will all be judged, by what we did for these the least of our brothers.

Libya: I take full responsibility for the loss of life in Benghazi. I know Secretary Clinton said the State Department was at fault, but that is part of my administration and I take full responsibility. We are taking the steps to improve security at all of our diplomatic missions. But, I also want to point something out. In the days after the attack, the people of Libya themselves surrounded the houses of the extremist groups that carried out the attack and shut them down. The Libyan government has joined the effort and is helping us find those who

committed this act of barbarism. Isn't that what we want? In the fight against terrorists, we need the help of moderate Muslims. Otherwise, we will never find all the terrorists, we will never have enough Marines to send in, we will never again live without fear. The Arab Spring unleashed a certain amount of chaos, to be sure, but it also put those countries on track to control their own destinies. There will be challenges but no one knew better than Ambassador Stevens, who died in Benghazi, that the future of Libya is brighter and more peaceful on account of the Arab Spring.?

The 47%: ?Governor Romney, the problem with what you said was not just that you were dismissive of almost half the country. The problem is not just that many people do not pay federal income taxes for good reason, because they are too poor or because they are seniors or because they are serving in combat overseas. The problem is that your comments seemed to suggest that those who are financially superior are also morally superior, that the poor are poor because, as you said, they don't take responsibility for their lives. Let me tell you. Get up early in the morning and come stand at a bus stop with me. You will see the woman who cleans your hotel room on her way to work. She is taking responsibility for herself. You will see the janitor who cleans your kids' school. He is taking responsibility for himself. You will see dozens and dozens of people who work just as hard as you and me, and they are struggling and they sometimes need a hand up. They are not looking for a hand out, just a hand up. They are decent, hard working Americans, and you painted them all as moochers. But, what really, really bothered me was that you did not have the courage to say this to their face. You said it in a room full of rich people in Boca Raton when you thought the cameras were not on. Shame on you sir.?

Immigration: ?During the primaries, Mr. Romney said he favored ?self-deportation,? that is, making life so miserable for undocumented workers that they will choose to leave. Now he says that he wants sensible reform. Which is it? Let me be clear. I believe we need comprehensive immigration reform. It is un-American and un-Christian that we separate children from their parents and wives from their husbands because some families have members with different legal status. It is wrong to allow some shady businesses to hire undocumented workers at lower wages, which pushes down wages for everyone. It is high time that we respect undocumented workers as human beings too, and respect their human dignity. They are children of God too. We have increased border security in the past four years, which must be a part of any solution. But, we must find humane solutions to the immigration problem, and self-deportation is not the answer and, frankly, I just don't see the Republican base allowing Mr. Romney to embrace a humane solution even if he wanted to.?

The HHS mandate ? sorry, Mr. President. I can't help you defend a policy I find indefensible.

I don't know what we will see on the stage tonight. I confess that during the first debate I think we saw a part of Obama's character that is decidedly there but usually hidden, the haughty side, the exemplar of the meritocracy of the left, the sense that his intellectual superiority is a kind of moral superiority, the umbrage taken that anyone would challenge him, the President. I suppose some of that side of his character is understandable: Others who have risen from humble origins to the White House have had unhappily tuned senses of their own power, with the happy exception of Harry Truman. Tonight, if he wants to win this thing, he must show us the other, and I think dominant, side of his character, the man who is fighting for those who are still left behind, those who are still struggling, those who do not send their kids to the fine schools or own two homes or have elevators for their cars. He must indulge a bit of populism not because it is effective, although it is, but because government is the only actor in society capable of challenging the moneyed interests and leveling the playing field. That was the moral impetus for the New Deal. That was the moral impetus for the Great Society. Those programs need tweaks, to be sure. But, tonight and for the next four years, they need a defender.

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