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Cardinal Dolan congratulates Obama, urges he give priority to vulnerable

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Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, congratulated President Barack Obama on his re-election in a letter Wednesday.

"The people of our country have again entrusted you with a great responsibility," Dolan said. "The Catholic bishops of the United States offer our prayers that God will give you strength and wisdom to meet the difficult challenges that face America."

Dolan added the bishops pray that Obama will "help restore a sense of civility to the public order, so our public conversations may be imbued with respect and charity toward everyone."

He said, "In particular, we pray that you will exercise your office to pursue the common good, especially in care of the most vulnerable among us, including the unborn, the poor, and the immigrant. We will continue to stand in defense of life, marriage and our first, most cherished liberty, religious freedom."

In the press release containing the text of the letter, the words "our first, most cherished liberty" were in italics. The bishops and the Obama administration have clashed for the past year on a federal Department of Health and Human Services mandate that would require most religious employers to provide contraceptive access to their employees, allowing for few exceptions.

With 270 electoral votes needed to secure a presidential win, Obama, a Democrat, had 303 to 206 for his Republican challenger, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. Florida's 29 electoral votes had not been decided the morning after the election Tuesday.

Four years ago, Obama, previously a U.S. senator from Illinois, received congratulations from a fellow Illinoisan -- Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, then president of the U.S. bishops -- when Obama became the nation's first African-American president.

"I believe we can seize this future together -- because we are not as divided as our politics suggest; we're not as cynical as the pundits believe; we are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions; and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are, and forever will be, the United States of America," Obama said at the end of his 20-minute address to supporters at a victory rally in Chicago during the early morning hours Wednesday.

"And together, with your help, and God's grace, we will continue our journey forward, and remind the world just why it is that we live in the greatest nation on earth," he added.

The Massachusetts-based group Catholic Democrats said in a statement Obama and Vice President Joe Biden's re-election "is a victory for the Catholic social justice tradition that has guided the conscience of our nation for

over a century. The American people chose a worldview that values community and the common good over one that puts the market and individualism before the welfare of all people."

A Catholic Democrats board member, Nicholas Cafardi, was co-chair of the Obama campaign's Catholic outreach effort.

Charmaine Yoest, president and CEO of Americans United for Life Action, took the Obama administration to task for its health care law and what she described as its efforts to expand access to abortion. In a statement Wednesday, she said she expected state legislatures and a "pro-life majority" in the House of Representatives to blunt those efforts during Obama's second term.

"Already, AUL has worked with 10 states in passing legislation to opt out of permitting taxpayer-subsidized abortion coverage through Obamacare," Yoest said. "And we predict that the courts are going to see an ever increasing number of lawsuits as Americans fight for their First Amendment rights of conscience."

Care Net, an organization that promotes alternatives to abortion, said it hopes Obama will honor a promise he made during his first term to make abortion "rare."

"In 2010, President Obama talked about the importance of making abortion 'rare.' Sadly, the record of his administration so far has been a record of expanding abortion, said Care Net CEO Roland Warren in a statement Wednesday. "Yet most American women agree: Abortion is not the best solution in an unplanned pregnancy situation."

In other reaction Wednesday, National Farmers Union president Roger Johnson said Obama "has shown his dedication to rural America over the past four years, and we will continue to work with him and the administration to ensure that continues."

United Auto Workers president Bob King said the president "stood by American workers in their darkest hour, and UAW members and citizens in communities that are part of the thriving auto industry, are grateful for his willingness to bet on us."

"Today," he said, "the domestic auto industry is roaring back, with investment in factories, new workers and manufacturing returned to our country."

"While the economy, health care and the deficit were the leading issues that voters specifically cited as most important in this election, the results also signal historic shifts in values and demographics," said a statement from Robert Jones, founding CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute.

In focus groups conducted by PRRI in Columbus, Ohio, the weekend before the election, "among white working-class independent voters, the participants emphasized economic issues like jobs, the deficit and taxes as their highest-ranked priorities for this election."

Jones said early exit polls also showed Obama "won younger voters under 30 by 23 points, while Romney won seniors by 12 points. And this year, as in 2008, younger voters turned out, rivaling seniors as a proportion of the electorate."

Another key issue in the election, he said, was the treatment of immigration and other issues important to Latino voters, "who now constitute 10 percent of all voters."

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