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Archbishop joins voices urging Obama to 'seize moment' on immigration

Patricia Zapor Catholic News Service | Nov. 14, 2012
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The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration joined the broadening chorus calling on President Barack Obama and Congress to "seize the moment" and pass comprehensive immigration reform next year.

In a statement issued Tuesday [1]during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual fall general assembly in Baltimore, Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez, committee chair, called on Obama and congressional leaders to work together on a bipartisan immigration reform bill.

He also encouraged people to make their voices heard in support of an immigration system "which upholds the rule of law, preserves family unity and protects the human rights and dignity of the person."

With the strong turnout of Latino voters in support of Obama's re-election Nov. 6, politicians from both parties have said they are willing to revive and follow through on the long-stagnant efforts to fix the problematic U.S. immigration system.

An estimated 11 million people in the U.S. lack legal immigration status. Most of them have no path to legalization that does not involve returning to their home countries to wait in lines that can take decades to clear. Many of those people live in families in which some members are U.S. citizens and others have legal immigration status.

In the week following Obama's re-election, House Speaker John Boehner and other Republican leaders have said they are ready to work together to pass comprehensive immigration reform, usually described as a bill that includes border security, a path to legalization and/or citizenship for undocumented residents, improvements in the family reunification immigration system and drastic changes in how work visas are allocated.

Efforts to pass such a bill have regularly revived and been beaten back in Congress for about 20 years.

In light of the quick turnaround in favor an immigration bill since the election, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, retired archbishop of Los Angeles, on Monday as the bishops' meeting opened, had requested a statement or letter on the topic from the USCCB president, New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan.

At a news conference Tuesday just after his statement was released, Gomez said the statement came through the migration committee rather than from Dolan as a matter of logistics during the tight time frame of the meeting.

Several other bishops at the press conference underscored their support for a reform bill.

Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the communications committee and immediate past chairman of the migration committee said the bishops have been calling for comprehensive immigration reform

for decades, only to repeatedly be told "it's not the right time."

"We're saying, how about now?" Wester said.

Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., chairman of Catholic Relief Services, said in his state the business community has recently begun to recognize that immigration reform is necessary for its economic success.

"The bishops' voice on this has been strong, consistent and clear," he said, adding that now support is needed from business and community leaders.

"There are still deaths in the desert," he said. "And people living in terror of being deported."

It's time to move forward, he added. "We've talked about this endlessly."

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