NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The best way to govern from the center

Pat Perriello | Feb. 18, 2013 NCR Today

It is a major question as to how the next year or so will go in Congress. Issues involving immigration, gun legislation and the budget cry out for attention. It seems the possibilities are to do nothing or to choose to get something done and work across the aisles to do so. Fareed Zakaria in the current issue of *Time* [1] seems to have the balance about right.

Zakaria's contention is that President Barack Obama is looking to accomplish something in all these areas, even if he is not able to achieve everything he may want. I believe the signs point in that direction. The real question: Will either Republicans or Democrats in Congress be willing to go along with the president? The jury is still out on that point.

My own sense is that the president will be able to drag Democrats kicking and screaming along with him as long as any entitlement reforms are seen as fair and do not unduly harm those who can least afford cuts. Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, despite her unabashedly liberal reputation, has time and time again held Democrats in line to achieve administration desired results.

Less clear is what Republicans might do. There have been a few encouraging signs. Republicans did decide not to go over the "fiscal cliff." They also understood that the debt ceiling was not the place to make a stand. On other issues, some Republicans have worked toward bipartisan agreements on immigration reform and universal background checks for gun ownership. The possibility of modest movement in these areas exists. As Zakaria said, this could prove to be a breakthrough for the United States and reduce the gridlock surrounding our government.

On the other hand, there are also rumblings that all is not well in the Republican ranks. Sen. Marco Rubio has worked with others to craft an immigration bill that may have a poison pill: A path to citizenship must wait until border security has been certified. What, if anything, will determine that border security has been obtained? It also appears that Republicans are determined to take their stand on budget cuts somewhere. Several are now suggesting it might be a positive thing to allow sequestration to go into effect. Cuts once thought unthinkable now seem for some the best way to ensure significant cuts to government. Once again, at least some Republicans seem to believe jeopardizing military preparedness or engendering a new and dangerous recession may be seen as preferable to the modest forward movement that could be possible.

I suspect the votes are there for positive movement in each of these areas. Many Republicans understand that continued obstruction is not what is best for either their party or their country. For progress to occur, however, there will need to be a break from the tea party agenda. It is interesting that Rubio gave the Republican response to the State of the Union address. Yet the tea party decided to have Sen. Rand Paul give its own response. That fact alone should be enough for the Republican Party to decide to reassert its own credentials and distance itself from the tea party, which sees itself more and more as a separate political entity.

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