News

U.S. Vice President JD speaks during the 52nd annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 2

U.S. Vice President JD speaks during the 52nd annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 24, 2025. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)



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Vice President J.D. Vance sharply criticized the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in a television interview that aired Jan. 26 for the bishops' condemnation of President Donald Trump's recent immigration enforcement policies, suggesting that the concerns were motivated by financial interests.

In a heated exchange on CBS's Face the Nation, Vance defended the Trump administration's decision to empower Immigration and Customs Enforcement to conduct operations in sensitive locations, including schools and churches.

Vance was responding to questions about the bishops' conference Jan. 22 statement condemning Trump's orders on immigration, describing them as "deeply troubling" because they "will have negative consequences."

Identifying himself as a practicing Catholic, Vance said he was "heartbroken" with the bishops' position and questioned their motives, suggesting they were not rooted in pastoral concerns but instead based upon substantial federal funding U.S. dioceses receive to help resettle immigrants.

"I think the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has, frankly, not been a good partner in common sense immigration enforcement that the American people voted for," the vice president said. "And I hope, again, as a devout Catholic, that they'll do better."

In response, the bishops' conference said in a statement on Jan. 26 that federal funding falls short of overall costs for the church's work resettling refugees. The conference also said each refugee is vetted and approved by the government for entry into the United States.

"Faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church has a long history of serving refugees," the conference said in a statement. "In 1980, the bishops of the United States began partnering with the federal government to carry out this service when Congress created the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program."

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Face the Nation moderator Margaret Brennan pressed Vance on whether he personally supported immigration raids in places traditionally considered sanctuaries, such as houses of worship and schools. Vance responded by asserting the administration's commitment to public safety, particularly when violent criminals are involved.

"Of course, if you have a person who is convicted of a violent crime, whether they're an illegal immigrant or a non-illegal immigrant, you have to go and get that person to protect the public safety. That's not unique to immigration," Vance said.

Vance's remarks took a sharp turn as he criticized the bishops' statement.

"Because as a practicing Catholic, I was actually heartbroken by that statement," Vance said. "I think that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops needs to actually look in the mirror a little bit and recognize that when they receive over $100 million to help resettle illegal immigrants, are they worried about humanitarian concerns? Or are they actually worried about their bottom line?"

When Brennan asked about the potential chilling effect of these enforcement actions, particularly on parents who may avoid sending their children to school out of fear of immigration raids, Vance responded, "I desperately hope it has a chilling effect on illegal immigrants coming into our country."

The federal government heavily relies on tax-exempt charitable organizations, many with religious affiliations, to process and support refugees entering the United States, with the bishops' conference playing a prominent role since 1975.

The bishops' conference on its website describes its migration and refugee services as "the largest refugee resettlement agency in the world." Over the past five decades, the conference has assisted millions of refugees and asylum seekers relocate in the U.S., finding them homes and jobs in American communities with the support of federal funding, the website says.

During the Biden administration, the conference's federal revenue for refugee assistance increased eight-fold to about $123 million in 2022 from about $15 million in 2019, accumulating over $450 million in grants since 2021.

The bishops' conference, in its statement on Jan. 26, said that in its agreements with the government the conference "receives funds to do this work; however, these funds are not sufficient to cover the entire cost of these programs. Nonetheless, this remains a work of mercy and ministry of the Church."

In an April 2024 letter to Congress, El Paso Bishop Mark J. Seitz, Chairman of the conference's Committee on Migration, outlined a 2025 federal funding request to enhance support for immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations.

The letter sought increased funding for immigration courts to address a historic backlog of more than 3.4 million cases, including 1.1 million asylum claims. Seitz also requested funding increases for victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied migrant children and labor protections against exploitation.

The bishops' conference also urged Congress to reject restrictions on asylum and called for alternatives in communities to immigration detention.

This article was updated at 7:15 p.m., eastern, with a statement from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.