Opinion
Guest Voices



President Donald Trump appears in the East Room of the White House Feb. 23. (RNS/AP/Alex Brandon)



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From the first days of President Donald Trump's second term, the U.S. Catholic bishops have repeatedly pushed back on administration policies. While their most frequently stated concerns have addressed the Department of Homeland Security's deportation effort, they haven't hesitated to speak out on other issues.

On Jan. 22, 2025, after the newly inaugurated president issued a raft of executive orders on everything from DEI to TikTok, the bishops responded by officially condemning the spirit behind the policies. Trump's executive orders, wrote Archbishop Timothy Broglio, then-president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which "focused on the treatment of immigrants and refugees, foreign aid, expansion of the death penalty, and the environment, are deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us."

They went on to say, "The use of sweeping generalizations to denigrate any group, such as describing all undocumented immigrants as 'criminals' or 'invaders,' to deprive them of protection under the law, is an affront to God, who has created each of us in his own image."

They also opposed "non-emergency immigration enforcement in schools, places of worship, social service agencies, healthcare facilities, or other sensitive settings where people receive essential services." The bishops decried the end to refugee resettlement programs and the deployment of military assets to support civil

immigration enforcement.

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The bishops did approve of an executive order that banned federal funding for any program "promoting gender ideology" or gender-affirming health care.

Immigration is a personal and ecclesial issue for the bishops, as 1 in 5 Catholics face either the risk of deportation or live in a household with someone who does. As the White House's immigration crackdown continued and arrests and deportations escalated, Broglio sent out another statement in June, saying, "the mass arrest and removal of our neighbors, friends and family members on the basis of immigration status alone, particularly in ways that are arbitrary or without due process, represent a profound social crisis before which no person of good will can remain silent."

When they met for their annual meeting in November, the U.S. bishops issued another strong statement that was almost unanimously approved by the body. The statement listed nearly a dozen aspects of the mass deportation campaign, calling themselves "saddened," "concerned," "troubled" and "grieved" about the climate of fear DHS had created, "about the vilification of immigrants," "threats against the sanctity of houses of worship," "the conditions in detention centers and the lack of access to pastoral care" and about parents who have been separated from their children.

The statement made clear that the bishops oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people. "We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement," and advocate for "meaningful immigration reform."



The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meets at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront hotel Nov. 11, 2025, in Baltimore. (RNS/Aleja Hertzler-McCain)

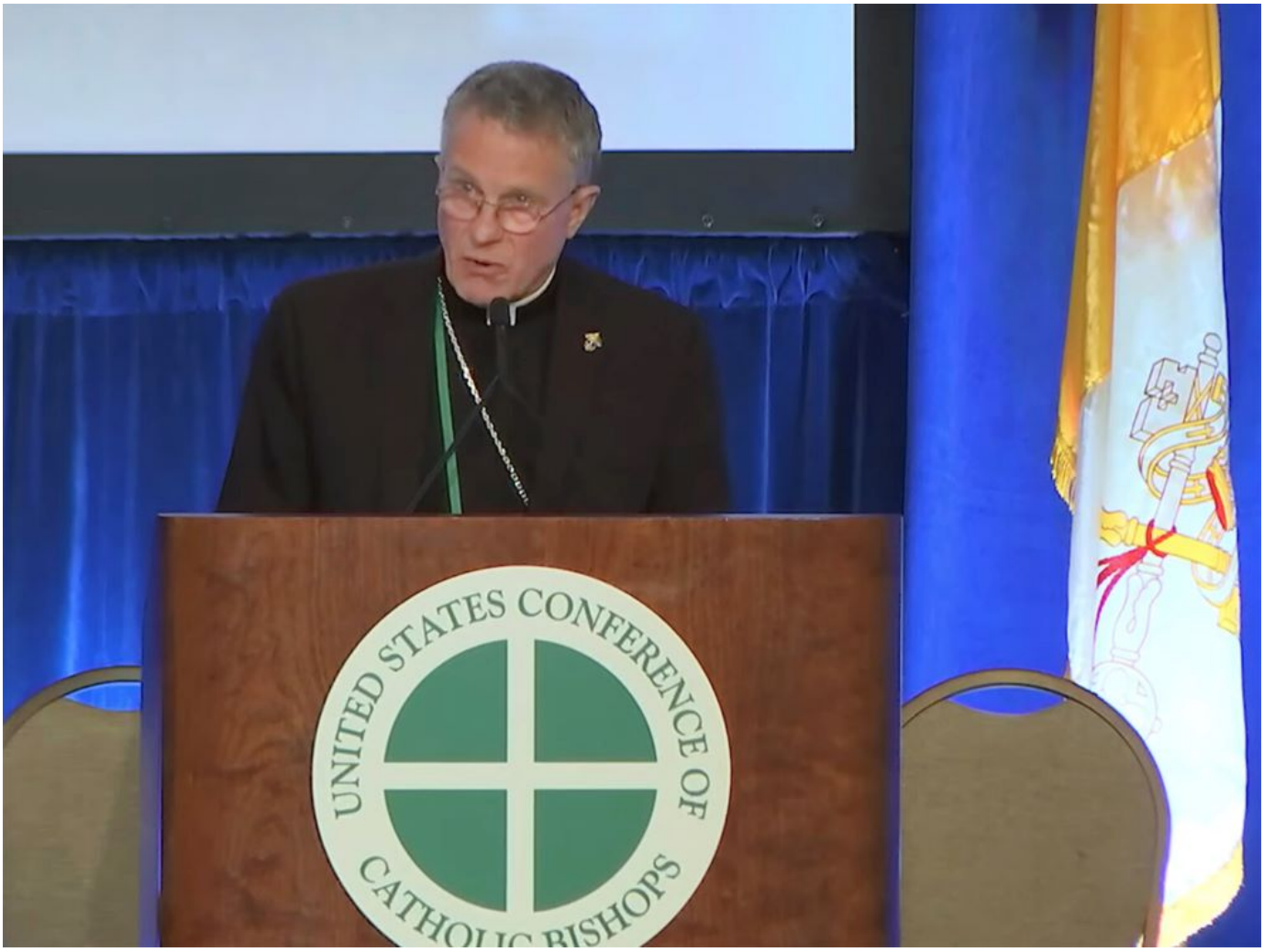
After two people were killed by immigration enforcement officers in Minneapolis in January, Archbishop Paul Coakley, the bishops' new president, connected the violence to the Catholic Church's commitment to "the dignity of every human life," saying in a Jan. 28 statement, "We mourn this loss of life and deplore the indifference and injustice it represents. The current climate of fear and polarization, which thrives when human dignity is disregarded, does not meet the standard set by Christ in the Gospel."

Last week, Bishop Brendan Cahill, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Migration, attacked as "deeply troubling" the administration's plans to spend $38 billion to double federal immigration detention capacity. "The federal government does not have a positive track record when it comes to detaining large numbers of people, especially families," Cahill said. "The thought of holding thousands of families in massive warehouses should challenge the conscience of every American."

Calling the move "a moral inflection point for our country," Cahill said, "We implore the Administration and Congress to lead with right reason, abandon this misuse of taxpayer funds, and to instead pursue a more just approach to immigration enforcement that truly respects human dignity, the sanctity of families, and religious liberty."

The bishops even spoke favorably of protests "throughout the country (that) reflect the moral sentiments of many Americans that enforcement alone cannot be the solution to addressing our nation’s immigration challenges."

The bishops have been no less outspoken about their opposition to Trump's major legislative endeavor, the Big Beautiful Bill. "Tax cuts that largely favor wealthier persons should not be made possible through cuts to healthcare and food for families struggling to make ends meet," they said in April, as the bill was being considered in Congress.



Archbishop Timothy Broglio addresses the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' spring meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2024. (RNS/Video screen grab)

As the bill was signed into law in July, Broglio said that it "includes unconscionable cuts to healthcare and food assistance, tax cuts that increase inequality, immigration provisions that harm families and children, and cuts to programs that protect God's creation."

The bishops have warned the administration about exiting the Paris climate treaty, and prior to the global climate forum, COP30, saying, "Failing to steward God's creation ignores our responsibility as one human family." They have expressed concern about the expiration of the New START treaty on nuclear weapons and raised questions about the administration's policies toward Venezuela, Cuba and Iran.

But no example of episcopal opposition to Trump's foreign policy was as striking as the response to Trump's threat to invade Greenland. In a Jan. 18 interview with the BBC, Broglio said a U.S. invasion of Denmark's territory would not be "just" or morally acceptable, and said that U.S. troops who are Catholic could conscientiously disobey orders to participate in such an action. He emphasized that invading a friendly NATO ally such as Denmark is not justified.

Broglio also called immoral the killing of survivors of an American attack on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean.

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These are extraordinary statements from a bishop who not only recently led the U.S. bishops' conference but who also heads the U.S. Military Archdiocese, especially in light of the Trump Justice Department's attempt to indict six Democratic lawmakers for treason when they advised U.S. service members to refuse orders they consider unlawful.

I've focused on official statements from USCCB officials, but individual bishops have spoken out against Trump policies, as has Pope Leo XIV, who called for humane treatment of migrants and refugees and for diplomatic solutions to international conflicts.

The pope was speaking in general terms, however, applicable to all countries. The U.S. bishops have targeted administration policies specifically.

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Abortion has been a preeminent issue with the Catholic bishops and, until Trump was running for a third time in 2024, the Republican Party. But with *Roe* vs. *Wade* overturned, Republicans are not interested in advancing any more of the bishops' pro-life agenda. Trump is even willing to compromise on the Hyde Amendment, which forbids federal funding of abortions in most cases, to achieve his budget priorities.

We have three more years of the Trump administration, and as long as it continues gutting health and welfare programs supported by the bishops while deporting and maligning their immigrant flock, I doubt things will get better between him and the U.S. bishops.

The only possible savior of this relationship is the Democratic Party: Never underestimate Democrats' ability to push the bishops back into the Republican camp. Democratic activists for whom abortion is a preeminent issue want to force Catholic institutions, doctors and nurses to perform abortions. They will no doubt demand the same for transgender policies. Short of allowing Catholics and their institutions to follow their consciences, the Democrats' nomination of a pro-choice Catholic presidential candidate would enrage many bishops and lead to episcopal attacks on Democrats.

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