

Clapping for Sister Carol

Michael Sean Winters | May. 7, 2010 NCR Today

Sometimes applause is just applause. There is applause that is polite. There is the applause at the end of the singing of the National Anthem. There is the applause from members of Congress when the President says something nice about apple pie or calls attention to the First Lady.

Then there are those moments when a group of people want to express their profound admiration and love for someone and, given the context, the only manner that seems suitable to express those feelings is with applause, even though it does not come close to expressing the depth of feeling. This was the kind of applause that greeted Sister Carol Keehan at NCR's Washington Briefing when she was introduced this morning. The room rose as one. The applause was loud, not to say raucous, and it was sustained.

That applause came from somewhere deep in the consciousness of the assembled Catholics, all of whom share a commitment to the Church's social justice traditions and teaching. It came from the years of frustration as successive presidents failed to find the political calculus needed to enact universal health coverage. It came, most especially, from the recognition that we almost encountered another chapter in that catalogue of frustration. But, at the last minute, Sister Carol, with that counter-cultural combination of a wealth of knowledge and experience and the unique authenticity of one who has chosen poverty, provided the moral push that pushed health care reform across the finish line.

We had come to hear Sister Carol speak, so we stopped the applause eventually. I wish it had gone on forever.

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