

Q & A: Jennifer Butler, Faith in Public Life

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 20, 2010 | Distinctly Catholic

This week, we are asking about the prospects of immigration reform. Yesterday we heard from Kevin Appleby of the USCCB. Today we hear from Jennifer Butler, executive director of the group Faith in Public Life.

The question: What will it take to get immigration reform passed this year, and what are the prospects for passage?

Jennifer Butler:

The faith community refuses to let comprehensive immigration reform get pushed off the legislative agenda. Catholic, evangelical, mainline Protestant and Jewish organizations are mobilized and not backing down. Here at Faith in Public Life, we're providing strategic media support to help faith-based organizations, churches and diverse congregations active on this issue garner press attention, and deepen a media narrative that often ignores these voices. For example, we promoted the Isaiah 58 Summer "rolling vigil" (moving from region to region) organized by the Interfaith Immigration Coalition to stand with the people of Arizona as they face draconian anti-immigrant legislation earning coverage from New Jersey to California. After President Obama's recent immigration speech at American University, FPL coordinated a press conference for interfaith leaders in front of the White House, where they kicked off "Justice July" a series of actions that include vigils, "pulpit swaps" and petitions that will culminate with a major event on July 28 when Arizona's law takes effect. We were also honored to support a new coalition of African-American and Hispanic pastors standing together to debunk claims of racial division on the issue of immigration reform, earning coverage for their launch in religious press and Spanish-language media.

As election cycles come and go without federal action, more states are taking up Arizona-style legislation that target entire communities and demonize immigrants. This approach surely helps make some elected officials look tough. A steely-eyed state senator can stare into a TV camera for a campaign ad and pledge to take on the lawbreakers. But a piecemeal strategy on immigration has failed to address a complex challenge that will never be solved strictly with enforcement-only measures. Let's not make a false choice between protecting our borders and upholding our nation's highest values. We can do both. Comprehensive reform will bring immigrants out of the shadows, help keep families together and crack down on unscrupulous employers who hire and exploit immigrant labor. Leveling the playing field will not only help immigrants, but also improve the prospects for workers of all backgrounds. In fact, a study by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Institute found that creating an earned path to legalization would add \$1.5 trillion to the economy over the next decade.

As the 2010 midterm elections loom, conventional wisdom in Washington says that comprehensive immigration reform faces a steep climb this year. I will leave it to the pundits and politicians to take up that debate. For those of us working at the intersection of faith and policy, we are not motivated by political calculus. We're inspired by core values at the heart of diverse faith traditions that call us to love our neighbors, welcome the stranger and shape policies that serve the common good. Using this lens, it's clear that comprehensive immigration reform is both an urgent moral priority and a pragmatic response to a broken immigration system.

Tomorrow's Interviewee: Congresswoman Linda Sanchez of California

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