

Faith & Stimulus

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 3, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Politico.com has an [important article](#) [1] today about President Obama's Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives and the work they have done helping religious organizations get money from the much maligned Stimulus Bill.

From new windows for a church school to direct aid for the homeless, millions of dollars have gone to faith-based organizations that have grown accustomed to operating on shoestring budgets. Catholic Charities -- which should be the first check you write for Christmas -- received \$50 million in Stimulus funds.

This is important at several levels.

First, the money flowed even though the bishops and the White House were engaged in a tug-of-war over health care reform: The White House could have penalized Catholic organizations on account of the bishops' stance, but they did not do that. As Father Larry Snyder of Catholic Charities said, "While it's true that the leadership of the Catholic Church has had disagreements with the administration, especially on life issues and on the details of health care reform, those issues really were kept separate from our ability to work with the administration on basic human services."

Second, conservatives denounced the Stimulus as ineffectual, but the contractors who put in those new windows at a Catholic school were paid to do so, and the factory workers who make the windows kept their jobs. That is how stimulus works.

Third, the White House has resisted the claims of some on the left to end the Faith-Based office. The hyper-separationists think this work is unconstitutional, but the White House gets high marks for realizing that the First Amendment cuts both ways. Why should a Catholic relief agency be penalized because it is Catholic?

As I have long maintained, the important thing about the Stimulus bill was not just the jobs it created or saved. The really important thing was the psychology of the bill. The economy was in free fall and the private sector was demonstrably incapable of restoring confidence. The country looked to the government to do something. Nothing is more destructive of the economy than a sense of powerlessness and fear.

Yes, the jobs that were directly saved or created by the Stimulus bill were important, but hundreds of thousands of more jobs were saved because the Stimulus bill told the entire country -- and the world -- that the U.S. government was not going to stand by and permit the free fall to continue.

Only the laziest of laissez-faire economists can fail to acknowledge what the Stimulus Bill accomplished. That it also helped out myriad religious organizations is icing on the cake.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1210/45897.html>