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## In moment of hope comes the challenge of accountability

by NCR Editorial Staff

### Editorial

Readers of a certain age might remember the story, c. 1967, in which a disillusioned conservative voter recalls the previous presidential election. "They told me if I voted for Goldwater, we'd have half-a-million troops in Vietnam. Well, I did - and they were right."

Democracy is a gamble. Presidents promise peace and deliver war, advocate humility and practice arrogance, promote morality and act corruptly.

Still, elections, like second marriages, represent the triumph of hope over experience. Through our votes we place our trust in a flawed human being and pray our victorious candidate will embody in correct proportions the virtues of prudence and wisdom, charity and courage, foresight and empathy, right reason and determination. Let it be so.

President-elect Obama based his campaign on "hope," which made him subject to both ridicule (the term being far too ambiguous to his many critics) and praise, particularly for those who saw the first credible African-American presidential candidate as a personal embodiment of the change this country needs.

Hope, however, may be the least of the virtues we need as our new president confronts, among others, these challenges facing our country:

- A global warming crisis that threatens God's creation.
- A run-away military budget.
- An economy headed into recession.
- An energy policy tied to the Middle East and built on depleted and irreplaceable resources.
- Two hot wars, neither likely to be resolved soon.
- A "war on terror" that threatens liberties at home.

- An international community that awaits us to re-join it as full partners.
- An immigration policy that treats the strangers among us like criminals.

The list goes on: a health care bureaucracy that places 40 million-plus Americans a severe illness away from bankruptcy, an education system that still leaves millions of children behind, and a punitive criminal justice infrastructure that incarcerates offenders at a scandalous rate and unconscionably executes those it deems especially guilty.

There is, it seems, much work to do.

Fortunately, as Catholics, we have been educated in our faith and values and our church provides us tools to discern the wise from the rash and helps us recognize the constant push to enrich the powerful rather than serve the common good.

With the road map of Catholic social teaching, combined with a sense of the moment we are in, we offer two areas where Catholics, particularly those who supported President-elect Obama, should hold the new administration accountable.

In 2004, both President Bush and his challenger, Sen. John Kerry, named nuclear proliferation as the greatest single threat to the United States. In this most recent campaign, the issue was rarely mentioned. It simply didn't come up.

More than two decades ago, at the height of the Cold War and the Nuclear Freeze Movement, the U.S. bishops decried the continued development of these weapons of mass destruction. What may have been theoretically justifiable then - the maintenance of large stockpiles of nuclear weapons designed to deter either side, the United States or the Soviet Union, from striking first - can no longer be justified on even those highly questionable grounds. Meanwhile, our nation, in a morally untenable and shortsighted act, is rushing full speed ahead with the building of a new generation of nuclear weapons.

Earlier this year, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, along with former Defense Secretary William Perry and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, called for "a global effort to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons, to prevent their spread into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately to end them as a threat to the world."

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President-elect Obama should make the elimination of nuclear weapons a cornerstone of his foreign policy and we, as citizens and Catholics, should hold him accountable for doing so.

Finally, those pro-life Catholics who supported Obama have a special obligation to hold the new administration accountable for policies that reduce the one-million plus abortions that take place each year in this country. All of us have an obligation to support women facing crisis pregnancies and provide systems of support once these children enter the world. But it is government that needs to assist in providing a full range of resources that can make the choice of life a genuine option.

Many prominent Catholics, strong pro-lifers among them, lent their prestige to the Obama campaign. They were assured that despite the president-elect's pro-choice views and record, an Obama

administration would make reducing the demand for abortion a key domestic priority. We must now work to assure that these commitments were genuine and not simply the tactical maneuvers of a clever campaign. The new administration should be measured by its commitment to the least among us, and this includes unborn children.

And then, maybe a McCain voter will look back at this election years from now and say, "They told me if I voted for McCain, abortion would be largely a thing of the past. I did - and they were right."

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