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Election '08: Obama Catholics will influence new administration

by Joe Feuerherd



Some Catholics will likely be more equal than others in an Obama administration. Among them will be Obama supporters who took a chance, who backed Obama during the Democratic primaries when they could have remained silent without political consequence or who bring a level of expertise the new president is likely to find useful.

Among them:

* Pennsylvania Sen. **Robert Casey**: Son of the late and legendary pro-life governor, the Scranton-born and -bred Casey lent his credibility to Obama at a key moment, endorsing him prior to his state's primary. Obama lost that contest to Hillary Clinton, but Casey's support, and his popularity with white working-class antiabortion voters, was essential to Obama's big general election win in the Keystone State.

* **Caroline Kennedy:** The 51-year-old daughter of the nation's 35th president was charged by Obama with one of his campaign's most sensitive tasks -- vetting possible vice presidential candidates. That process was, by all accounts, smoothly administered, resulting in the choice of Sen. Joe Biden, a Catholic, as Obama's running mate. Kennedy endorsed Obama in January 2008 in a *New York Times* op-ed piece. Among the posts for which Kennedy has been mentioned is ambassador to the Court of St. James, a job her grandfather, Joseph P. Kennedy, held under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or ambassador to the United Nations.

* **Douglas Kmiec:** The Pepperdine University law professor and one-time supporter of Mitt Romney's presidential campaign offered his rationale for backing Obama in a campaign book, *Can A Catholic Support Him?: Asking the Big Question About Barack Obama*. A former dean of The Catholic University of America law school and a high-ranking Justice Department official in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Kmiec's endorsement was condemned by some, including Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput, but welcomed by others who viewed his pragmatic approach to curtailing abortion as a welcome alternative to criminalization of the procedure.

* **John Podesta:** The former Clinton White House chief of staff heads both the Obama presidential transition team and the Center for American Progress, the District of Columbia think tank he formed in 2003. A parishioner of Georgetown's Holy Trinity Parish, Podesta will be a significant player during the Obama administration, whether he chooses to remain inside or outside of a formal government role. The center, meanwhile, is expected to be both a source of human capital and intellectual and policy heft to the new administration.

* **Tim Roemer:** The former seven-term Indiana congressman and member of the 9/11 Commission co-chaired the Obama campaign's Catholic outreach effort and was among the pro-life Democrats whose strong support for Obama helped convince antiabortion voters that Obama's approach to the issue -- reducing the number of abortions rather than overturning *Roe v. Wade* -- was an acceptable alternative. Roemer is president of the Center for National Policy, a foreign policy-focused think tank in Washington.

* **Kathleen Sebelius:** The second-term governor of Kansas, a graduate of Washington, D.C.'s Trinity College, backed Obama just prior to Kansas' caucus, providing an eloquent woman's voice to the campaign at a time when Hillary Clinton was making a strong case to Democratic women voters. Sebelius was reportedly on Obama's shortlist for vice president. She was a tireless Obama surrogate during the general election campaign. Sebelius cannot serve as governor past 2010.

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