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Five former US ambassadors to Vatican endorse Romney

by Mark Pattison by Catholic News Service



WASHINGTON -- Five former U.S. ambassadors to the Vatican have endorsed Mitt Romney in his campaign to win the Republican nomination for the presidency.

The Romney campaign released the ambassadors' statement Jan. 7, three days before the New Hampshire primary, customarily the first such primary in the nation every presidential election year.

"We believe it is important to support the one candidate who is best qualified by virtue of experience, intelligence and integrity to build on all that is best in our country's traditions and to lead it to a future where every American has the opportunity to reach his or her highest potential. That candidate is Mitt Romney," said the former ambassadors, all of whom are Catholics.

Thomas Melady, who was Vatican ambassador during the presidency of George H.W. Bush, told Catholic News Service in a Jan. 10 telephone interview that the statement was "very positive" and "didn't bring up the religious question."

Some GOP activists have voiced their concerns over Romney because of his Mormon faith.

Melady, now a senior diplomat in residence at the Institute of World Politics in Washington, had been at the forefront of a statement issued in November by several Catholics urging that "all inclinations to raise the issue of personal religious affiliation be avoided" in the presidential campaign. He said at the time of the earlier statement's release that it was prompted by a Dallas megachurch pastor's remarks at the Values Voters Summit in October that Mormonism was a "cult" and Romney was not a Christian.

The ambassadors, in their statement, said they were "united in our wholehearted support for the candidacy of Mitt Romney for the presidency of the United States because of his commitment to and support of the values that we feel are critical in a national leader."

They called Romney's "superior understanding of America's key role in our increasingly interdependent world and his appreciation of the fact that sound economic and social policies must rest on a healthy culture" as the basis for their decision.

"We are confident that he understands the importance of strong families as pillars of a vibrant economy and a flourishing polity," the ambassadors said. "Romney is a staunch defender of the principle that every human being should be welcomed in life and protected by law from conception to natural death."

Melady told CNS that Harvard University law professor Mary Ann Glendon, who was ambassador to the Vatican 2008-09, crafted the statement and sent it to Melady for his consideration. Glendon had also backed Romney's 2008 bid for the GOP presidential nomination. "I liked it," Melady said of the statement. "It didn't attack the president. ... It didn't call (Barack) Obama bad names."

He added the group of ambassadors who signed were "very balanced and ecumenical." In addition to Melady and Glendon, two other Republicans, Jim Nicholson and Francis Rooney -- who served the first and second terms, respectively, as Vatican ambassador during the presidency of George W. Bush -- and one Democrat, Raymond Flynn, Vatican ambassador during the first term of President Bill Clinton. Flynn, though, endorsed Bush in the 2000 presidential campaign, and another Republican, Scott Brown, in the 2010 U.S. Senate election in Flynn's native Massachusetts.

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"I'm hoping we'll look at other values in the United States" when selecting candidates, Melady said. "If you run for president, you're subject to total scrutiny ... I would hope that includes how that you've been as a family man. Have you carried out your civic responsibilities? Have you paid your taxes?"

Melady said the Romney endorsement was not meant to disparage two Catholics seeking the Republican nomination, former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

"I know both of them. They're both fine gentlemen," Melady said. "I supported him (Santorum) when I was executive officer of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Gingrich I know going back for years. I think it's a mistake if some people want to deliberately dig into the religious question."

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