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Sen. Barack Obama names Catholics to his National Advisory Council

by Mary Barron

Sen. Barack Obama (D.-Ill.) has assembled a National Catholic Advisory Council to boost his campaign in a presidential race where Democrats continue to take the lead in religious discussion by embracing the social gospel.

Noted theologians, nuns, peace and justice activists and prominent elected officials are included in the geographically diverse group. It includes people who publicly disagree with Obama's pro-choice stance on abortion.

Sen. Bob Casey (D-Penn.) said he disagrees with Obama about abortion but that Obama has gifts of leadership that he demonstrates by listening to different perspectives. "He understands that even when there's disagreement, you have an obligation of trying to achieve common ground, and try to go down the path that leads to the common good, and I think he will do that as president."

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D.-N.Y.) has done far better among Catholic Democratic voters, particularly in the heavily Catholic northeast. The Obama campaign's announcement of the advisory council Friday can be seen as an effort to close the gap in the upcoming Pennsylvania primary. But the campaign is also positioning itself for a potential general election run to win religious voters away from presumptive Republican nominee Sen. John McCain (R.-Ariz.), who has stayed away from much of the religious discussion in the current campaign.

"As a committed Christian, Sen. Obama has shown a really deep commitment to reaching out to communities of all faiths, and we're thrilled to be launching this National Catholic Advisory Council," Joshua DuBois, Obama's director of religious affairs, told reporters in a conference call Friday. "I don't recall a time in recent history when a Democratic candidate has made such an early and sustained effort to

reach out to American Catholics and all faith communities.?

In addition to house parties and round-tables, the group plans to organize neighborhood canvassing walks to discuss shared values and show why Obama is ?the candidate for Catholics,? DuBois said. Phone-banking among Catholics is also in the works.

Leaders of the council lauded Obama?s work for the poor and criticized the Republican Bush administration?s record. Sharon Daly, a social justice advocate from Maryland on the council?s steering committee, said ?The next president will inherit a country that?s been bankrupted by the Bush administration in every possible way,? including moral bankruptcy. ?The Bush administration has not called America to think about others, to believe in the common good, to believe that we are all in this together and deserve each other?s help. We need a president who can bring people together,? she said.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton, former president of the National Assembly of Women Religious, said she struggled with her decision because ?for the first time in history there was a woman up for president.? But she said she works with many young college graduates, attuned to Catholic social justice teaching, in efforts to relieve poverty, address housing needs and advocate for fair trade. ?To a person they began a process of convincing me that Sen. Obama was the one to become president,? she said. ?Obama seems to have a vision that flows from his comfort in different worlds, the intersection of class and race and identity? that will be important in the global community, she said.

Here is the roster for the council:

National Co-Chairs

Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania

Representative Patrick Murphy of Pennsylvania

Former Congressman Tim Roemer, President of the Center for National Policy

Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas

Governor Tim Kaine of Virginia

Tom Chabolla, Assistant to the President, Service Employees International Union

Victoria Reggie Kennedy, President, Common Sense About Kids and Guns

Sr. Jamie Phelps, O.P., Director and Professor of Theology, Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Xavier University

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton, Congregation of St. Joseph

National Steering Committee

Mary Jo Bane, Professor, Harvard Kennedy School

Nicholas P. Cafardi, Catholic Author and Scholar, Pittsburgh, PA

Lisa Cahill, Professor of Theology, Boston College

M. Shawn Copeland, Associate Professor of Theology, Boston College

Ron Cruz, Leadership Development Consultant, Burke, VA

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Sharon Daly, Social Justice Advocate, Knoxville, MD

Richard Gaillardetz, Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies, University of Toledo

Grant Gallicho, Associate Editor, Commonweal Magazine

Margaret Gannon, IHM, A Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA

Don Guter, Judge Advocate General of the Navy (2000-2002); Rear Admiral, Judge Advocate General's

Corps, U.S. Navy (Ret.), Pittsburgh, PA
Cathleen Kaveny, Professor of Law and Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame
Jim Kesteloot, President and Executive Director, Chicago Lighthouse
Vincent Miller, Associate Professor of Theology, Georgetown University
David O'Brien, Loyola Professor of Catholic Studies at the College of the Holy Cross
Peter Quaranto, Senior Researcher and Conflict Analyst, Resolve Uganda (Notre Dame Class of 2006)
Dave Robinson, International Peace Advocate, Erie, Pennsylvania
Vincent Rougeau, Associate Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame
Mary Wright, Inter-Faith Liaison, Louisville, KY

National Leadership Committee
Governor Jim Doyle of Wisconsin
Former Senator Majority Leader Tom Daschle
Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois
Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts
Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts
Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont
Representative Xavier Becerra of California
Representative Mike Capuano of Massachusetts
Representative Lacy Clay of Missouri
Representative Jerry Costello of Illinois
Representative Bill Delahunt of Massachusetts
Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut
Representative Anna Eshoo of California
Representative Raul Grijalva of Arizona
Representative Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island
Representative John Larson of Connecticut
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Representative James Oberstar of Minnesota
Representative Linda Sanchez of California
Representative Carol Shea Porter of New Hampshire
Representative Peter Welch of Vermont

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