

Catholic views mixed on the president-elect

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The nation's economic situation was the dominant factor for voters who elected a Democrat to the presidency for the first time in 12 years Nov. 3.

President-elect Bill Clinton and his vice presidential running mate, Al Gore, defeated incumbent President George Bush by a margin of 43 to 38 percent of the popular vote. Independent H. Ross Perot was third with 19 percent.

On state ballot measures, voters upheld a Maryland law prohibiting restrictions on abortion and rejected an Arizona initiative that would have outlawed most abortions. They also rejected a California attempt to legalize physician-assisted suicide.

Pro-life activists were quick to call Clinton's election an economic decision by voters. They voiced fears that as a campaign strategy, Clinton "committed himself to an abortion policy far more extreme than that favored by the majority of Americans," said Wanda Franz, president of the National Right to Life Committee.

Helen Alvarez, the U.S. bishops' spokeswoman on pro-life matters, said she would concentrate first on challenging Clinton's support for the Freedom of Choice Act.

Clinton supported the bill, which died without a vote in the 102nd Congress but is expected to be reintroduced quickly. The original version would have prohibited any state or local restrictions on abortion. But Clinton told Catholic News Service before the election that he believed states should have the right to require minors to notify their parents before having abortions and to legislate restrictions like 24-hour waiting

periods.

If the Freedom of Choice Act looks as if it will become law, the U.S. Catholic bishops will lead pro-life activists in the fight to ensure that the legislation includes clauses protecting health-care workers opposed to abortion, according to John M. Kerry, executive director of the New York State Catholic Conference.

The National Catholic Educational Association also may find itself taking a different approach toward the White House.

Sister Catherine T. McNamee, president of the NCEA and a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, said although Clinton opposed one Bush administration proposal that would have helped Catholic schools, there are other areas on which the group agrees with him.

In a letter this fall to a group of Catholic school administrators, Clinton listed education reforms he favors that Sister McNamee supports, such as tax breaks for low-income parents and federal funding for anyone who wishes to attend college.

Clinton opposed Bush's proposal to provide vouchers that parents could use for public or private schools. Because of his opposition, one observer pointed out that parents favoring federally funded school-choice programs must bury their hopes for at least the next four years.

"I don't think we can look forward to a parental choice bill, because President-elect Clinton has clearly stated he is against it," said Kevin M. Donoghue, executive director of the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents.

Donoghue's group has strongly advocated school-choice programs at the state and local levels. He expressed puzzlement at the Democratic Party's opposition to federally funded school vouchers.

"I think it's kind of ironic because Catholics have been identified with the Democratic Party for so long," he said.

Donoghue's group will push for a



AP/Wide World Photos

WINNING TEAM — Vice President-elect Al Gore (right) listens as President-elect Bill Clinton speaks during a Nov. 5 news conference at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion in Little Rock.

school-choice bill in New York state next year, he added. Six state assemblypeople and two state senators have expressed interest in actively supporting the bill, he commented.

Despite Clinton's opposition to school vouchers on the elementary and high school levels, the NCEA will push the incoming president to address other concerns of Catholic educators, according to Sister McNamee.

Sister McNamee said the NCEA will ask Clinton and Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Educa-

tion Act, particularly its Chapters 1 and 2, which provide funds for remedial education for low-income students and for school equipment such as computers.

Meanwhile, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles applauded voters' rejection by 54 percent to 46 percent of a referendum that would have allowed doctors to help patients commit suicide. He called the vote "a major victory for God's plan and design for the human family."

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