

WORLD & NATION

Religious leaders join finance reform debate

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — As the Senate got down to business on campaign finance reform in mid-March, one usually active behind-the-scenes participant in congressional debates remained silent.

The U.S. Catholic Conference — which has lobbied Congress over the years on issues ranging from Aid to Families with Dependent Children to policy on Zimbabwe — has taken no official position on the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2001, sponsored by Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Russell D. Feingold, D-Wis., or any of the alternative proposals to overhaul the federal campaign financing system for the first time in 25 years.

But that's not to say that the senators aren't hearing some religious viewpoints on the legislation.

At a March 20 press conference in Washington, the Rev. Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, was joined by leaders of Christian denominations and Jewish groups in calling for quick passage of the McCain-Feingold proposal without amendments. Also at the press conference was Sister Anne Curtis, a Rochester Sister of Mercy representing Network, a national Catholic social justice lobby.

"Participation in the political process and the life of the nation are a right and responsibility of all, not a privilege of wealth," said Sister Curtis.

The NCC-sponsored Religious Leaders for Campaign Finance Reform organization also sent a March 16 letter to senators calling campaign finance reform "much more than a political or economic matter."

"Wide-scale cynicism about the value of one's vote is undercutting America's faith in government," they said. "Respect for public service is being further eroded by the current campaign finance system, which gives the appearance that political access and favors are for sale to the highest bidder."

Catholic signers of the letter included Bishop Richard C. Hanifen of Colorado Springs, Colo.; Father Arthur M. Johnson, minister general of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement; Sister Patricia J. Chappell, president of the National Black Sisters Conference; Jesuit Father Robert F. Drinan, a former member of Congress; death-penalty opponent Sister Helen Pre-

jean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille; and more than 130 leaders of men's and women's religious communities.

"Most critical" to the campaign finance reform debate, they said, was to retain the legislation's "ban on 'soft money' contributions to national political parties, more effective regulation of 'issues ads,' and greater disclosure of campaign contributions."

It is precisely those issues which have drawn a storm of criticism from the National Right to Life Committee.

The pro-life organization says the latest version of the McCain-Feingold legislation "contains multiple provisions that infringe on the right of citizen groups to communicate with the public regarding the actions of elected officials — a right that the Supreme Court has repeatedly held enjoys the highest degree of immunity from government regulation under the First Amendment."

In a March 16 analysis of McCain-Feingold, the NRLC said the proposal would "ban many types of groups from sponsoring any broadcast ads during pre-election time periods if they even mention the name of a member of Congress, and would allow certain other types of groups to do so only under an array of restrictions that would greatly reduce the amount of such speech."

According to the National Right to Life Committee, the McCain-Feingold bill would prohibit issues-oriented groups from making a statement like this to its members: "Senator McCain has introduced an awful bill that would restrict the right of pro-life groups to communicate with the public about the voting records of members of Congress. Please write to Senator Jones and urge him to oppose the bill."

Also coming under fire from the NRLC is a House proposal sponsored by Reps. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., and Martin T. Meehan, D-Mass., which the group said contains "even more restrictive" provisions than the Senate plan.

Shays-Meehan "would restrict the right of issue-oriented organizations to communicate with the public regarding pending legislation and the positions of those who hold or seek federal office," the NRLC position paper says. "Some of these restrictions would apply at any time of the year and to any medium, including newspaper ads, leaflets, mailings and phone banks."

Vatican talks with Lefebvre group

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A Vatican spokesman confirmed that, at Pope John Paul II's request, formal talks have been opened with a group of followers of the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

The contacts between the Vatican and the Priestly Society of St. Pius X are still going on, the spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said March 22. He gave no further details of the talks, which began last year.

The society's bishops were excommunicated in 1988 with Archbishop Lefebvre, a self-styled traditionalist who rejected the Second Vatican Council's reforms in liturgy, ecumenism and other areas of church life.

Last year, when the Lefebvre society made a jubilee pilgrimage to Rome, the society's bishops were invited to lunch by Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos. Cardinal Castrillon is the head of the Vatican commission "Ecclesia Dei," which has tried to reintegrate Catholic followers of Archbishop Lefebvre, especially those attached to the old Tridentine Mass.

Vatican sources have said that while the

contacts with the St. Pius X society have continued, it is too early to speak of concrete moves toward reconciliation.

In January, Bishop Bernard Fellay, head of the St. Pius X society who has met with Vatican officials, said his organization was open to talks with the Holy See but did not intend to modify its principles and policies about Vatican II.

The rejection of Vatican II reforms was what led to the break between the Vatican and Archbishop Lefebvre. It became a formal schism when the late archbishop ordained four bishops against papal orders in 1988.

One of the most divisive issues in the long-running dispute has been use of the Tridentine Mass, which was replaced after Vatican II. The Vatican has allowed the Tridentine Mass with a local bishop's permission, but the St. Pius X society is seeking a blanket permission for priests worldwide.

Cardinal Castrillon said recently that he was interested in preparing a new instruction on use of the Tridentine Mass. He said the instruction would attempt to tie together the old and new rites in a way that would lessen the pastoral tension between them.



Reuters/CNS

A moving pope

A 13-foot-tall bronze statue of Pope John Paul II is moved to a new church in Montevideo, Uruguay, March 24. The one-ton sculpture was situated at a church built on a spot where the pontiff celebrated Mass during his 1988 visit to the country.

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