

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 10, 1976

Your Excellency:

I want to thank you and other leaders of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for visiting with me today to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest. Because many of these issues are highly sensitive, I thought it might be helpful to set forth my views on paper so that others who could not be with us might have a more precise understanding of my convictions on these issues.

One of the most controversial issues of our time and one in which we share a keen interest is the question of abortion. I have grave concern over the serious moral questions raised by this issue. Each new life is a miracle of creation. To interfere with that creative process is a most serious act.

In my view, the Government has a very special role in this regard. Specifically, the Government has a responsibility to protect life -- and indeed to provide legal guarantees for the weak and unprotected.

It is within this context that I have consistently opposed the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court. As President, I am sworn to uphold the laws of the land and I intend to carry out this responsibility. In my personal view, however, this court decision was unwise. I said then and I repeat today -- abortion on demand is wrong.

Since 1973 I have viewed as the most practical means of rectifying the situation created by the Court's action a Constitutional amendment that would restore to each State the authority to enact abortion statutes which fit the concerns and views of its own citizens. This approach is entirely in keeping with the system of Federalism devised by the founders of our Nation. As Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, I co-sponsored an amendment which would restore this authority to the States, and I have consistently supported that position since that time.

My position has been based on three fundamental convictions:

- I am against abortion on demand.
- The people of every State should have the Constitutional right to control abortion.
- There is a need to recognize and provide for exceptional cases.

I should also point out that the Republican Platform which I support is fully consistent with these views.

I recognize that this abortion question is a matter of deep personal and moral conviction. Honorable people may disagree, but all of us must be concerned about an increased irreverence for life within advanced societies.

Americans have benefited greatly by our rich spiritual heritage. The sound, sensible lessons of goodness imparted by religious teachers and devoted parents have done more than anything else to prepare our children for life.

A second issue of mutual concern is the future of non-public schools. Traditionally, those schools have made a vital contribution to our society, richly adding to the fiber of the American experience. We are a Nation that values competition and diversity. I believe that diversity is as important in education as it is in politics, business, the professions, in our personal lives and in our cultural traditions.

I know that these last few years have not been easy ones for non-public schools. This has been a period of self-examination. I want you to know that as President, I am totally committed to support your efforts to provide the best possible education for the approximately four million children enrolled in Catholic institutions.

Earlier this year, I proposed to the Congress a block grant program to combine 24 existing programs for Federal assistance to elementary and secondary education. This legislation, which would make \$3.3 billion available to State and local governments during fiscal year 1977, provides that non-public school children will continue to be served equitably.

In all that I do as President, I will continue my dedication to freedom of educational opportunity in order to guarantee the continued high quality of the educational tradition in non-public schools -- a tradition for which you deserve great credit.

A third issue of mutual concern is the policy of the United States toward relieving hunger and malnutrition in the world. The United States, I am proud to say, has a strong record of responding positively to this matter, in keeping with both the tradition of humanitarian concern of the American people and the sense of responsibility which we who are more fortunate feel toward those with less.

We have tried to address the two main aspects of the world food problem in the most constructive way possible:

-- First, to alleviate an immediate need for food assistance, the U.S. will be able to furnish this year about six million tons of food assistance, 6 million of the 10 million ton annual food aid target set for all countries at the World Food Conference in Rome. Through our PL-480 program, we are able to use the enormous productivity of the American farmer to meet human needs with grain which the poorer nations could not otherwise afford to import.

-- Second, through our foreign assistance program, we are seeking to curb some of the underlying causes of the food problem by working to improve agricultural production in the developing countries, particularly those which suffer major shortfalls in food. This is of critical importance to the prospects for economic growth.

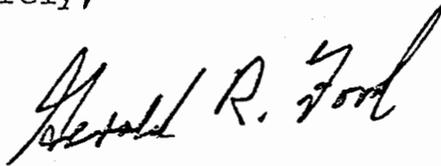
Private voluntary agencies also play an important role in the overall U.S. assistance effort, and have made a major contribution in alleviating world hunger, providing inputs of both food and economic assistance -- an inspiring demonstration of the humanitarian zeal of the American people.

Last year this country proposed the creation of an international system of nationally held food reserves which would provide against the human and economic disaster which could result from a global shortfall in grain production. We are continuing to push for conclusion of an agreement on this proposal in the International Wheat Council.

Let me add one final note. When I visited the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia last month, I commented that "for millions of men and women, the church has been the hospital for the soul, the schoolroom for the mind, and the safe depository for moral ideals. It has given unity and purpose to the affairs of man. It has been a vital institution for protecting and proclaiming the ultimate values of life itself." That is a view I have long held. It is one that I reaffirm now.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today. I look forward to future discussions with you and with others of every faith.

Sincerely,



The Most Reverend Joseph L. Bernardin  
29 East 8th Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202