

2012 NRCCC meeting with White House staff

Meeting report by Rev. Tom Theriault,
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The White House, Tuesday, April 24, 2012

Representatives of the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC) met with White House officials today and presented formal policy statements from American religious organizations on the moral and ethical dimensions of climate policy. These policy declarations declare the seriousness of the climate problem, uniformly call for strong action now, and propose ways for the U.S. to regulate and reduce greenhouse gases.

The NRCCC is a coalition of religious leaders from across America's faith traditions.

Representatives, reflecting the spectrum of major religious organizations in America, sought to propose ways that the White House might reignite action on climate change. Ms. Amanda Hansen, a Policy Outreach director for the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), privately informed the NRCCC that presently there is no White House policy on climate change.

In explaining this absence, White House staff related that insufficient public support exists for strong action on climate, mostly because disinformation and confusion persist about the problem.

NRCCC replied that the religious statements represent, when all of their membership is tallied, a majority of the American population.

Darron Monteiro, representing the White House Office of Public Engagement, responded that religious groups may have strong declarations, but so far, it appears that only their leadership understand the problem, and the rank and file membership still remain in uncertainty and confusion.

Besides, he continued, "there is little publicity that religious organizations hold these positions. It isn't in the media and church groups do not usually send advisories on their declared positions to the White House."

To remedy this predicament, NRCCC proposed two actions. First, the White House, perhaps through the CEQ, should develop a religious advisory council which would keep the White House informed on religious activities regarding climate change, and generally advise the White House on the moral and ethical dimensions of the climate issue. This would help shift the debate from the science onto the moral issues and onto the measurable data about the dramatic rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide where there is no controversy.

The staff found value in this proposal and said that they would pass this idea on to others where the concept would be evaluated.

Second, the NRCCC proposed that the White House reach out to the republican majority in the House on moral and ethical grounds rather than on scientific grounds since there is so much resistance to accepting the science, at least among key House leaders.

On this proposal, staff liked the idea, but again would have to pass that idea to White House leadership.

A lively discussion then ensued about the way attitudes in America change and how every major movement in American history had religion as a major force. Ms. Deborah Fikes, attorney and Executive Advisor for The World Evangelical Alliance, Dallas, Texas, suggested that young people hold an important key to helping the Obama Administration embrace a strong position on climate change. "They have a unique voice to ask their elected officials to be 'friends of the future,' and they also can ask that standards for clean air and clean water not regress and that green jobs will be available for their generation.

Additionally, she added, "I think that mothers also could have a significant voice if the First Lady were to expand her emphasis on health to environmental issues."

After the ninety minute meeting, participants left with a sense that they had made clear and cogent points to the White House leaders on the importance of highlighting the moral dimensions to climate change issues.

Reverend Tom Theriault, pastor at Solana Beach Presbyterian Church, outside of San Diego, California, observed that this meeting underlined for him the crucial role the Christian voice must play in influencing citizen opinion and the actions of elected officials. he said that it also ignited him with a sense of the urgency that surrounds the climate problem and that challenges us all to communicate more effectively this urgency to those in our institutions.

End of report

photos: attached

Quotes:

The opportunity to meet with key leaders in the Obama administration that have much responsibility in the challenges the U.S. is facing environmentally was inspiring to me personally and strengthened my resolve to encourage and support them in these critical months ahead.

In discussing how religion can help the Obama Administration engage the climate problem?

Good question, Fred. I think the younger generation is key. They have a unique voice to ask for their elected officials to be "friends of the future" (phrase the Sec. of Interior has used recently) and they also can ask for the standards of clean air/ clean water to not regress and that green jobs will be available for their generation? I think that mothers also could have a significant voice if the First Lady were to expand her emphasis on health to environmental issues, what is in our air, water, food chain? just some quick thoughts and thanks for all the work you are doing on this!

I left the White House meeting with two impressions:

- 1). The four administration staffers, even one who claimed “I’m not a religious person,” emphatically underlined the crucial role the Christian voice must play in influencing the opinion of our citizens and the actions of our politicians.
- 2). I raised the question: Who are the actual opinion leaders in the various Christian expressions in our country, and how can they be ignited with an urgency about climate change and challenged to communicate that to their followers?

Thanks again, Fred, for including me in that stimulating discussion.

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