

# Adviser says health, immigration reform remain priority for Obama

WASHINGTON - A White House adviser told people at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering Feb. 8 that the Obama administration remains committed to passing health care and immigration legislation, despite political setbacks in Congress.

Cecilia Munoz, director of intergovernmental affairs at the White House, told more than 200 social ministry workers who made it to Washington despite weather-related travel problems that it will take continued hard work by the faith community to pass health care reform and new immigration policies.

Munoz, who started her career working for Catholic Charities in Chicago on immigrant legalization, said the lessons learned in that job continue to shape her approach in the administration.

Working to improve the world “one person, one family, one community at a time” as she learned from the church is still a solid way to approach public policy, she said.

In a teleconference two days later, a panel of religious leaders and members of Congress described just such an approach toward rallying the religious community to push for immigration reform.

Father Jon Pedigo, pastor at St. Julie Billiart Parish in San Jose, Calif., said in the Feb. 10 teleconference that volunteers organized by the church in his city are visiting different parishes, high schools and colleges to talk about the need for immigration reform.

He described an atmosphere of fear in his parish, after police recently conducted a traffic check nearby.

As word spread that police were stopping cars, dozens of families didn't pick up their children at school that day, leaving them waiting in the rain.

“Local businesses noted a 70 percent loss of store traffic,” he said. “Every day

thousands of Silicon Valley families live in fear and in some cases, panic, that their families will be separated.”

The teleconference announced that within the next month more than a million postcards will be delivered to members of Congress, sent by people reached through their churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious communities.

Munoz said at the ministry conference that health reform and immigration reform are both important parts of the administration’s focus on the economy, because of the high costs implicit in continuing current health and immigration policies.

“If our goal is economic recovery, it’s hard to imagine setting up that on top of a broken immigration system,” Munoz said. “Our goal is to take a system nobody believes is working and make sure we have one that is functional.”

As many in the audience at the ministry gathering know from advocacy for immigration reform, Munoz acknowledged that the issue “inspires a bit of emotion ... yelling.”

“That is no reason to back down,” she urged conference participants. “But it’s a reason to lean forward. You have a particular role to play in describing what you see and hear (from the people you serve).”