



March 26, 2010

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Minority Leader, United States House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Boehner:

I am writing to you today as a fellow Catholic with a shared love for our country, for Ohio, and of course for our Church. This is an important time for all three, with the passage of national health care reform legislation, with the Ohio State Buckeyes still in the NCAA tournament, and with the beginning of Holy Week this Sunday.

However, my letter is motivated by a concern for the strife our nation is experiencing as a result of the passage of the national health care reform bill, particularly with regards to your words and actions – or lack thereof – which have contributed to this dangerous environment. I am particularly concerned because we are about to enter Holy Week, the most sacred season of the year for us as Catholics.

As someone who has been active in politics, I cherish our free speech rights and the importance of the First Amendment to our democracy. At the same time I appreciate that entering into politics is not for the faint of heart. I also know that when people feel unsafe, and a climate of fear engulfs our society, that it is incumbent upon our leaders to bring their influence to bear – in word and deed – to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our citizens for the common good..

I'm sure that you are more aware than I of the acts of political terror that have occurred in the past week. Windows were shattered at the Tucson office of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ), at the Niagara Falls office of House Rules Committee Chairwoman Louise Slaughter (D-NY), and a propane gas line was cut at the home of Bo Perriello, brother of Rep. Tom Perriello (D-VA). The FBI is investigating death threats that have been made against at least 10 members of Congress. The Capitol Police met with members of the House Democratic Caucus to ensure their safety.

I wonder if you feel the anxiety experienced by so many people in the Cincinnati community, and particularly Rep. Steve Driehaus's family, as a result of your comments, and the subsequent political attack ads that target his children. I wonder if you have thought how the Driehaus's will spend this weekend with a demonstration being planned for Palm Sunday outside of their home in Cincinnati.

We won't know if we are at a tipping point – going from incivility to some more widespread or horrific criminal and political terrorist activity – until something dire happens. If it does, then it will

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be too late. You must know that in the psyche of an angry and unstable person – even if you intended your words in a different context – ambiguous threats can incite violent responses.

Taken together, your recent comments – first your reference to Armageddon and then your prediction regarding the [political] life of your colleague Rep. Driehaus – are themselves deeply troubling. However, the way you have addressed the legitimate criticism leveled against you has been even more troubling. You have equivocated in both words and actions. In qualifying your disapproval of recent events by expressing "understanding" for people's "anger," you have passively legitimized it.

Calling such actions "inappropriate" is remaining silent on the condemnable nature of these actions. Contributing to social unrest – if even through misconstrued words that have been allowed to remain in the public consciousness without denouncing them – is condemnable.

Representative Boehner, you have a responsibility to our country, our state and our Church to put politics aside now.

I urge you to:

- Condemn in the strongest terms and without equivocation, the acts of violence, the death threats, and even the use of incendiary words that, at best, have unwittingly contributed to the current state of unrest.
- Call on people who opposed the passage of national health care to respect the elected officials who voted for it and to respect the democratic system they claim to protect. Make clear to them that the criminal actions we have witnessed must be prosecuted.
- Make clear to them that the legacy of being a "great American" – demonstrated by the noble leaders of our country – includes living the "golden rule" and advancing the common good, fundamental values of our shared faith.
- Act in word and deed by issuing a written statement that can be posted to your Web site. And I urge you to rise on the floor of the house when you return and give your statement as a matter of public record for the posterity of our nation.

Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokesperson for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, reminded us yesterday in a column on the bishops' Web site of the words of St. Augustine, that Pope John Paul XXIII invoked in his first encyclical "On Truth, Unity and Peace." St. Augustine said, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity."

In faith, unity, diversity and charity,



Lisa Schare
Chairperson
Catholic Democrats of Ohio