

Pope: Francis advocates abolition of the death penalty

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meeting with homeless people at the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington. Late in the day he was leaving for New York for more prayer services and a speech to the United Nations.

The pope's whirlwind three-day visit to Washington was the first stop on a three-city U.S. tour that winds up in Philadelphia.

On Wednesday he was cheered by jubilant crowds as he visited the White House — where he and President Barack Obama embraced each other's warnings on climate change — paraded through Washington streets in his "popemobile," addressed U.S. bishops, noting the clergy sex abuse scandal, and celebrated a Mass of Canonization for Junipero Serra, the Spanish friar who founded major California missions.

Introducing himself at the Capitol as "a son of this great continent," the Argentine pope, reading his remarks slowly in English, spoke from the same dais where presidents deliver their State of the Union speeches. Behind him sat Vice President Joe Biden and House Speaker John Boehner, the first and second in line to the presidency, both Catholics. Outside, tens of thousands watched on giant screens, and many more were watching on TV around the world.

Lawmakers of all political backgrounds and religious affiliations eagerly welcomed the pope, pledging to pause from the bickering and dysfunction that normally divide them and hear him out. Yet Francis spoke to a Congress that has deadlocked on immigration legislation, at a time when there are



Pope Francis along with the congressional leadership, and local clergy, speaks from the Speaker's Balcony on Capitol Hill in Washington today following his address to a joint meeting of Congress.

Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post

more than 11 million people in the U.S. illegally, and where some lawmakers have balked at Obama administration plans to accept more of the migrants from Syria and elsewhere who are now flooding Europe.

Indeed, Francis arrived at a moment of particular turmoil for Congress, with a partial government shutdown looming next week unless lawmakers can resolve a dispute over funding for Planned Parenthood related to the group's practices providing fetal tissue for research.

Francis steered clear of

such controversies, alluding only in passing to the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion when he noted, to applause, "our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development."

He advocated abolition of the death penalty, something that enjoys support from a number of lawmakers of both parties at the federal level, and spoke out against fundamentalism of all kinds, while urging care in combating it.

"A delicate balance is required to combat violence perpetrated in the name of a

religion, an ideology or an economic system, while also safeguarding religious freedom, intellectual freedom and individual freedoms," Francis said.

On immigration, Francis urged lawmakers — and the United States as a whole — not to be afraid of migrants but to welcome them as fellow human beings, not things that can be discarded just because they are troublesome.

Francis, the son of Italian immigrants to Argentina, recalled that America itself was founded by immigrants, that many lawmakers are descend-

ed from foreigners and that new generations must not "turn their back on our neighbors."

Given an ovation when he spoke of the Golden Rule, he said, "Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated."

He reiterated his stance on climate change, "the environmental deterioration caused by human activity."

Yet in calling for action on the climate and to combat poverty, Francis took care to insist he was not anti-business, as some conservatives have

suggested. He quoted a Catholic teaching document calling business "a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world."

Many lawmakers had vowed to preserve decorum throughout the speech and members of both parties listened intently, yet they did not completely contain their reactions. The mention of climate change drew standing cheers from Democrats while Republicans stood to applaud the reference to abortion. One Democratic House member let out a whoop of delight at the pope's call to abolish the death penalty.

Republicans in particular also loudly applauded as Francis asserted the importance of family life and bemoaned that "fundamental relationships are being called into question as is the very basis of marriage and the family." The Catholic Church opposes gay marriage, recently legalized by the Supreme Court.

Francis also criticized the arms trade, significant before Congress because the United States is the world's largest exporter of weapons.

On Thursday, security was tight outside the Capitol, with streets blocked off and a heavy police presence that rivaled an Inauguration or State of the Union address by the U.S. president. The scene on the West Lawn was festive but orderly.

Francis enjoys approval ratings the envy of any U.S. politician as he's remade the image of the Catholic Church toward openness and compassion, yet without changing fundamental church doctrine. Addressing a chamber full of elected officials Thursday, he may have been the most adept politician in the room.

LNG: It will be months before applications arrive at the commission

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"It's important to note that we can hear from constituents," Balensifer said at Tuesday's meeting. "We're not ignoring constituents."

When it comes to general expressions of support or opposition unrelated to the facts of the application, "we can hear from constituents on that," he said.

But when it comes to in-person feedback from constituents, the commissioners can choose

to either shy away from conversations that broach the facts of the applications, or they can take detailed notes and disclose the conversations, which would become part of the record.

Balensifer said that constituents who wish to make pointed remarks on the LNG permit applications' substance should send them to the city's planning staff since it will be months before the applications come before the commission. Earlier this month, Plan-

ning Director Skip Urling recommended, at a two-part public hearing, that Daniel Kearns, a land use attorney from Portland serving as hearings officer, approve Oregon LNG's permit applications. Kearns said he will probably issue a written decision between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Whether Kearns approves or denies the applications, the decision will almost certainly be appealed to the City Commission, casting the commis-

sion in a quasi-judicial role.

As they must with any land use application that has a quasi-judicial bearing, the commissioners must act impartially and base their decision on the city's codes and standards. Laws that restrict private conversations about a project exist, theoretically, to ensure the commissioners' interpretation of those codes and standards is formed during the public hearing, not before, Balensifer said.

"That's part of trying to

make sure that we remain unbiased, per the law, and are objective according to the facts and evidence in the record," Balensifer said.

He added that, where LNG is concerned, the commission has to exercise caution and uphold the integrity of the process. "We'll do our due diligence," he said. But "we still intend to hear — and will hear — from constituents."

Mayor Mark Kujala said he has told constituents, when

they approach him in a store or post office, that the commission is "trying to be extremely careful about being biased, and we want to make sure that we are going to be hearing this as an executive board."

"I think everybody's been extremely respectful and understands what position we are in, and what our role is going to be when it comes to an appeal, as (the LNG permit applications) likely will be appealed," Kujala said.

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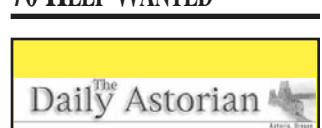
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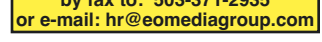


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