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NOTRE DAME STUDENT GROUPS DENOUNCE UNIVERSITY'S CHOICE FOR COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Statement follows

NOTRE DAME, IN, 25 March 2009 – A number of student groups at the University of Notre Dame issued a statement today repudiating the University's selection of President Barack Obama to deliver its 2009 Commencement Address. The statement criticizes the president's position on abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and other life issues, and chastises University administration for apparently looking over what they termed "fundamental moral principles."

The statement responds to Friday afternoon's announcement of Obama as the speaker for the University's 164th Commencement. Citing Catholic teaching on abortion, as well as the US Bishops' 2004 document "Catholics in Political Life," which deals with issues surrounding a Catholic response to politicians who advocate abortion, the student statement expresses "deepest opposition" to the decision. "This is not a partisan issue; rather, it's an issue of respect for human life, and our Catholic character. We want to emphasize that we are not attacking the office of the President, but taking issue with his moral stances. I think the statement makes it clear that the student body of Notre Dame is not unequivocally in favor of this decision," said senior Emily Toates of Notre Dame Right to Life.

An Ad Hoc committee sponsored by a coalition of University-sponsored student groups has been organized to lead student response. These groups include Notre Dame Right to Life, Jus Vitae (Notre Dame Law School Right to Life), the *Irish Rover* independent student newspaper, Notre Dame College Republicans, The University of Notre Dame Anscombe Society, The Identity Project of Notre Dame, Notre Dame Knights of the Immaculata, Notre Dame Children of Mary, the Orestes Brownson Council, and the Notre Dame Law St. Thomas More Society.

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STUDENT COALITION STATEMENT ON THE 2009 UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES

In defense of the unborn, we wish to express our deepest opposition to Reverend John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.'s invitation of President Barack Obama to be the University of Notre Dame's principal commencement speaker and the recipient of an honorary degree. Our objection is not a matter of political partisanship, but of President Obama's hostility to the Catholic Church's teachings on the sanctity of human life at its earliest stages. His recent dedication of federal funds to overseas abortions and to embryonic stem cell research will directly result in the deaths of thousands of

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Notre Dame Student Groups Denounce Choice for Commencement Speech (con't)

innocent human beings. We cannot sit by idly while the University honors someone who believes that an entire class of human beings is undeserving of the most basic of all legal rights, the right to live.

The University's decision runs counter to the policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops against honoring pro-choice politicians. In their June 2004 statement *Catholics in Political Life*, the bishops said, "The Catholic community and Catholic institutions should **not honor** those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors, or platforms which would suggest support for their actions." Fr. Jenkins defends his invitation by saying that it does not honor or suggest support for the President's views on abortion, but rather support for his leadership. But our "fundamental moral principles" must be respected at all times. And the principle that requires us to refrain from the direct killing of the innocent has a special status even among the most fundamental principles. President Obama's actions have consistently shown contempt for this principle, and he has sought political gain by making light of its clear political implications. Leadership that puts the lives of the most innocent at risk is leadership we must disdain. In the face of President Obama's actions, Father Jenkins' words ring hollow.

It is a great irony that the University has chosen to award President Obama an honorary law degree. As the oldest Catholic law school in the country, the Notre Dame Law School states that its mission is "to facilitate greater understanding of and commitment to the relationship between law and social justice." The social justice issue of our day is the deliberate, legal attack on the most vulnerable members of society, the unborn. To award a Notre Dame law degree to a lawyer and politician who has used the law to deny equality to the unborn diminishes the value of the degree itself.

Additionally, Fr. Jenkins has placed some of his students in a moral dilemma as to whether they should attend their own graduation. Many pro-life seniors, along with their families, are conflicted about whether to participate in the commencement ceremony. The lack of concern for these devoted sons and daughters of Notre Dame, who love this University and the Catholic principles on which it was built, is shameful.

In response to the University's decision, we pledge ourselves to acts of witness that will be characterized by respect, prayerfulness, outspoken fidelity to the Church, and true concern for the good of our University. It is appropriate that only members of the Notre Dame community lead all such protests, and we ask outside groups to respect our responsibilities in this regard. Over the next several weeks, in response to this scandal, our organizations will host various academic and religious events to engage the University community. We request any groups who are committed to respectful actions to support our efforts, thereby ensuring a unified front and a more compelling public witness.

In Notre Dame,

Notre Dame Right to Life
The Irish Rover Student Newspaper
Notre Dame College Republicans
The University of Notre Dame Anscombe
Society
Notre Dame Identity Project

Militia of the Immaculata
Children of Mary
Orestes Brownson Council
Notre Dame Law School Right to Life
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