Written by **Michael Tennant** on May 24, 2021

Biden Declines Notre Dame Commencement Invitation After Thousands Sign Petition Opposing His Appearance

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President Joe Biden turned down the opportunity to deliver this year's commencement address at the University of Notre Dame after a scathing petition urging the Catholic school not to honor the professing Catholic president garnered more than 4,600 signatures.

The White House confirmed to the Catholic News Agency that Biden had been invited by the university — the school itself would neither confirm nor deny it — but claimed he could not attend the May 23 ceremony because of a scheduling conflict.

It seems likely, however, that the strong opposition to his appearance, reflected in part by the large number of petition signatories, also played a role in his decision.

The petition, a letter to Notre Dame president John Jenkins, begins: "We, the undersigned members of the Notre Dame community and others dismayed by the pro-abortion and anti-religious liberty agenda of President Joe Biden, having learned … that you are considering inviting President Biden to be Commencement speaker and, accordingly, recipient of an honorary degree, write to urge that you not do so."

In a January interview with the online Catholic newspaper *Crux*, Jenkins hinted that he would invite Biden to speak at commencement, citing the university's "long tradition of welcoming U.S. presidents to campus."

The petitioners pointed out that the "long tradition" is "not … unbroken," noting that, as far as they knew, neither Donald Trump nor Bill Clinton was invited to speak on campus. (Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, did give the 2017 commencement address.)

Jenkins further stated, "We can and should welcome elected leaders to our campus … while we acknowledge where we disagree."

While the petitioners agreed with that statement in general, they maintained that having Biden as commencement speaker would confer honor upon him, which conflicts with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' pronouncement that "the Catholic community and Catholic institutions should **not honor** those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles."

Petitioners continued:

> Biden is such a person writ large. He rejects Church teachings on abortion, marriage, sex and gender and is hostile to religious liberty. He embraces the most pro-abortion and anti-religious liberty public policy program in history. The case against honoring him is immeasurably stronger than it was against honoring President Obama, an action that alienated countless Catholics and brought upon Notre Dame the harsh criticism of 83

cardinals, archbishops and bishops.

They observed that, contra church teaching that abortion is a mortal sin, "Biden's actions already taken and those promised will result in the killing of countless innocent unborn both here and abroad." In an appendix, they listed several of his pro-abortion policies, including his reversals on federal funding of abortion, his promise to force Catholic institutions to pay for abortifacient coverage for their employees, and his withdrawal from the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which denies the existence of rights to abortion and taxpayer funding of it.

They excoriated Biden for his "personally opposed but nevertheless will promote and enable" stance, writing, "It is singularly blameworthy to help people do what one knows to be wrong."

"As to issues of sex, gender, and marriage," they declared, "Biden's actions already taken and those promised are breathtaking in scope and will undermine the religious liberty of individuals in their private lives, employment, businesses, and social and religious activities and of religious organizations and institutions."

They noted in the appendix that Biden cheerfully performed a "same-sex marriage in the White House"; "has directed that all federal regulations and policies prohibiting sex discrimination be construed to apply to homosexuals and transsexuals," which "will be bitterly divisive … and destructive of religious liberty"; and has made passing the misnamed Equality Act a "top legislative priority."

Notre Dame, they concluded, has a "responsibility … to guard Church teachings that are crucially important in today's society by conferring its honors upon those who support them rather than upon those who oppose them, especially the one person above all who has the will and the power to undermine them."

The message apparently did not get through to Jenkins, for it was left to Biden — who, perhaps, did not wish to court controversy — to decline Notre Dame's invitation. Instead, finance executive and university trustee Jimmy Dunne addressed the class of 2021.

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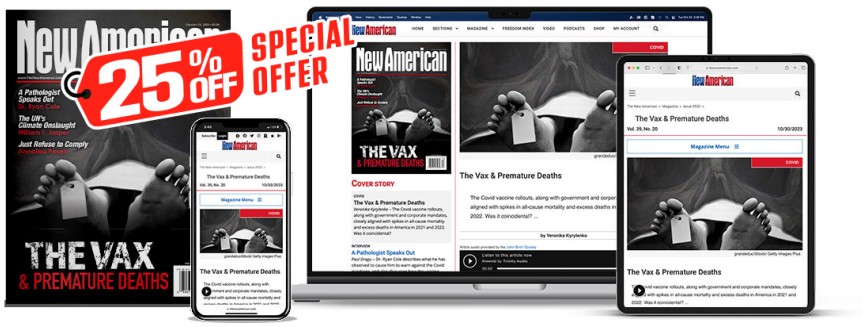

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