

Samuel Rodriguez: In No Way Will I Surrender My God-Given Access to President Trump

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez is no stranger to the White House. The president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference has served as an adviser in various capacities to the last three presidents: George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

He also prayed at the 2017 inauguration of President Trump.

“I have access that’s God-ordained and God-given,” he told CBN News in a wide-ranging weekend interview on Long Island. “It has to be the grace of God, so I’m not going to in no way shape or form negate or surrender that access because of pressure coming from one side.”

Rodriguez and other leaders who serve on the president’s evangelical advisory board have been hit with an avalanche of criticism since the unrest in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Their critics have called on them to quit the board in protest of the president’s response to the Aug. 12 Charlottesville protests over Confederate statues. Specifically, critics were angered over Trump’s failure to quickly call out white supremacists and neo-Nazis, as well as his remarks a few days later that there were “very fine people” on both sides and that both sides were to blame.

So far, just one board member, Pastor A.R. Bernard, has left, while others have reaffirmed their commitment to the board and publicly supported the president’s remarks about Charlottesville.

Rodriguez says Trump was wrong to not immediately call out

white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Charlottesville but defended his involvement on the board as “my God-given assignment.” He said those calling for his resignation from the board are largely inconsistent.

“Where was that argument ‘Why don’t you abandon,’ why don’t evangelical advisers abandon Obama when he affirmed and celebrated and advanced the cause of same-sex marriage? Where was the uproar when Obama expanded/funded Planned Parenthood, funded international abortions?” he asked.

Rodriguez characterized the board as one that gives “very straight talk” to the president.

“I’ve never been in a conversation where the faith advisory board is silent. This is not a rubber-stamp board,” he said. “It’s a board that’s committed to the centrality of Jesus and biblical truth.”

The Trump board differs greatly from those in previous administrations. It’s informal, with no recognized leader or structure, and its make-up is thoroughly evangelical and largely conservative.

In contrast, both President Obama’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and President George W. Bush’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives had more formal structures which included White House staffers and leaders from a variety of faiths.

Michael Wear, a former member of the Obama office, told CBN News recently that he’d like to see the current board become more diverse in representing different faith viewpoints and do a better job of holding the president accountable, but he’s not calling for its end.

Meanwhile, Rodriguez questions whether those who’ve called for the board’s dissolution have thought through the consequences.

“What if President Trump would not have a faith advisory board and no one speaking truth and love and mercy and grace and reconciliation to him?” he asked. “My point is, people should be thanking God every single day for the faith advisory board.”

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