

Samuel Rodriguez Says Obama Meeting Was Like Talk 'Amongst Believers'

President Obama sat down with evangelical leaders on Wednesday to discuss hot button issues.

Obama's meeting with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) took place in the Roosevelt Room after the president spoke at the White House Forum on American Latino Heritage at the U.S. Interior Department.

The Obama-NAE meeting focused on five issues: international religious freedom; domestic religious freedom; budget and poverty; immigration reform; and the Jobs Act.

Evangelical leaders had the opportunity to express what is important to Christian constituents and discover areas in which the evangelical community can collaborate with and support the president.

Charisma News caught up with Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and a member of the NAE executive committee, to learn more about the relationship between the NAE and Obama, as well as the outcome of the meeting.

Charisma News: What was the tone of the meeting with President Obama?

Rodriguez: Very affable. Very much a conversation amongst friends. We had about 19 evangelical leaders—all an integral part and members of the NAE—and we had a great conversation with the president. We had the opportunity to share with the president. Although we may disagree with the president on certain issues, we did it with great deference and civility.

Not only was the meeting cordial, it sounded like a conversation amongst believers. The meeting was edifying, to say the least.

Charisma News: That's good news. I always like to hear those reports.

Rodriguez: It is good news. And again, there was a unique aspect to this meeting. I have participated in a number of meetings with the president. This one had a very positive tone to it. The president was more than inclined to listen to our concerns and really demonstrated a genuine level of concern likewise and of understanding. We really appreciate that.

Charisma News: What did you discuss surrounding religious liberty?

Rodriguez: We discussed religious liberty not only abroad with the current situation in Iran and, of course, the recent intervention of our State Department as it relates to the evangelical pastor. But we also went beyond that to Coptic Christians and all Christians, for that matter, in Egypt and around the world.

We also discussed the religious liberties we have here in the U.S. as it pertains to hiring practices. We talked about the concern we have with regard to legislation that was already passed through the House but is getting stuck in the Senate. We all know that there is genuine support for legislation to protect religious liberty but it is weighted down with some procedural matters on the Senate side.

Charisma News: What about the budget? What were the sentiments there?

Rodriguez: We want to lower the debt and we know what a sacrifice that is. There are some services that we provide to the poorest of the poor that we need to continue to provide. We affirm that commitment.

Charisma News: Where do we go from here?

Rodriguez: It wasn't a meeting that facilitated or requested from the president any level of commitment. It was just a cordial open conversation between America's evangelical leaders and the president of the United States. But again, it felt like a conversation amongst Christian brothers and sisters. The spirit of the meeting was very positive, affirming and validating. I am encouraged. I think it's important that the president understands where the evangelical community stands on a number of these issues.