

Church leaders praise nuclear arms treaty

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Catholic bishops and leaders from Protestant organizations are hailing the Senate's ratification of a treaty with Russia that would reduce both countries' nuclear arms by about 30 percent.

Despite some early objections from Republicans, the Senate on December 22 approved the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) by a vote of 71 to 26. President Obama brokered the deal with Russia last April.

The National Council of Churches and Church World Service had unanimously adopted a call to ratify the treaty at their November joint meeting in New Orleans.

When two Republican senators, Jim DeMint of South Carolina and Jon Kyl of Arizona, argued against ratification in a busy lame duck session before Christmas, the NCC's top executive, Michael Kinnamon, publicly noted an irony. "If anything, this time of year should be an encouragement for our leaders to work harder for peace on earth," Kinnamon said in a statement.

Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, New York, who chairs the U.S. Catholic bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, commended the bipartisan vote. "It was important that senators joined across party lines to support this treaty," he said. The Vatican and U.S. bishops have long advocated for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

The Two Futures Project, a group of evangelical Christians that lobbies for nuclear arms reduction, called the vote an occasion for celebration. "This is one step in the right direction for nuclear security in our day . . . [and] it is a huge victory for American Christians, who overwhelmingly and vocally supported the treaty," the group said.

When ratification seemed uncertain in early December, Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, joined with Hubbard to urge Senate

concurrency.

The American Friends Service Committee, noting that it has campaigned since 1945 to eliminate nuclear weaponry, said that while the New START treaty is "a modest step toward the nuclear-free future we need, the next steps wouldn't be possible without taking this one."