

Catholic bigotry either do not know me or are maliciously seeking political advantage by making these accusations.

The institution of this House means a great deal to me. I believe each of us, as Members of this House, should look out for this institution and treat it with respect.

As your Speaker, I feel a special burden to do so. It is with that conviction that I say to each of you that I believe the political maneuvering on this issue may have catastrophic unintended consequences, like children playing with matches.

In fact, in light of this controversy, some critics now advocate that we get rid of the Office of the Chaplain altogether. There are editorials being written to that effect in papers around this country. I ask each of you to search your heart: Is that what is good for this institution? I hope your answer is no.

But that, my friends, is where the political games could be taking us. I think to lose the Office of the Chaplain would be a grave mistake. Ever since the first prayer was offered in the Continental Congress on September 7, 1774, 2 years before the Declaration of Independence was written, Congress has been blessed by a daily prayer.

The daily prayer has served as a peaceful refuge for the partisan wrangling. It has bound disparate factions under the unifying theme of God's love.

The first amendment to the Constitution states clearly that "Congress should make no law respecting an establishment of religion." But, at the same time, the rules and precedents of this House say that the Chaplain shall attend at the commencement of the House and open the same with prayer.

These contrary impulses signify two great American themes: Americans should have the freedom to practice any religion they want, but Americans also believe that this Nation was founded under God to fulfill a greater mission.

The House Chaplain must reflect both traditions. The Chaplain of the House must submerge his or her own doctrinal views while reaching out to all Members regardless of religious faith. He must say a prayer that unites us rather than divides us.

Our current House Chaplain, Jim Ford, has blessed us with daily prayers and counseled Members quietly with honesty and integrity.

Jim Ford is a Lutheran, but he does not preach Lutheran doctrine from the House pulpit.

□ 1615

His message is universal. In fact, Tip O'Neill, an Irish Catholic and our respected former Speaker, often called Jim Ford monsignor as a way to signify his approval of Ford's universal message. I believe that any representative of any religion can provide a similar universal message for the House of Representatives. My support for Charles Wright had nothing to do with

Mr. Wright's denomination or his religious doctrine. Of the three candidates presented to me by the committee, I believed he had the best ability to help the Members of the House based on his extensive experience in counseling. I agree with our colleague Tony Hall, who first suggested to Dr. Wright that he apply, that first and foremost Charles Wright has a pastor's heart.

Sadly, it has become clear that the minority will never support Charles Wright to be the House Chaplain. I have waited more than 4 months in the hope that voices of reason would prevail. Charles Wright is a good and decent man. He would make an excellent chaplain. That is why I asked Leader GEPHARDT to allow him to meet with the Democratic Caucus and that is why our colleague TONY HALL, a man whose respect in this House is unmatched, made the same request. But those requests have not been fulfilled. Instead of hearing the positive voice of a Godly and caring man, the only voices we hear are whispered hints in dark places that his selection is the result of anti-Catholic bias.

My friends, in all my years in this Congress, I have never seen a more cynical and more destructive political campaign. That such a campaign should be waged in connection with the selection of the House Chaplain brings shame on this House.

During the interview process, DICK GEPHARDT explained very eloquently to one of the candidates that democracy was a substitute for war. He was warning the candidate that if he became the Chaplain, his flock would not always behave like folks on a Sunday afternoon picnic. He went on to say that unlike war, where men set out to destroy one another, in a democracy, we were constrained by a set of rules and a common decency. It was a moving and profound observation that I have often thought a lot about. But I must say that the history of this Chaplain issue over the last 4 months does not appear to be constrained by common decency. It looks a lot like war and it has an ugly face.

This institution, so important in the protection of our freedom, is more important than which one of us sits in that chair. In the light of this controversy, Charles Wright has told me that he does not want to serve as Chaplain in a divided House. I reluctantly agreed that I would accept his decision not to be our Chaplain. I regret that decision of Dr. Wright, but I understand it.

So where do we go from here? As Speaker of this whole House, I will act to stop those who want to persist in this unseemly political game. I will not allow this House to be torn apart and the office of Chaplain to be destroyed. Having formally received the resignation of Chaplain Ford, I am today under the authority granted to me under the rules and precedents of this House to fill vacancies naming Daniel Coughlin to serve as Chaplain of the

House. Father Coughlin is the vicar of the Archdiocese of Chicago and comes with the highest recommendations from a man of God for whom I have great respect, my good friend Cardinal George of Chicago. I believe that Daniel Coughlin will bring to the House a caring and a healing heart. He has been a parish priest and spent the past several years counseling parish priests within the Archdiocese. He brings 40 years of ministerial experience to this House.

Daniel Coughlin is a Catholic. That does not make him more nor less qualified for the job. But I am proud of his historic appointment. I hope his appointment will help us to heal and that it will bring a sense of pride to the millions of Catholic men and women around this country who have had legitimate feelings of past discrimination which some in this House have sought to manipulate.

I urge all of my colleagues to get to know Father Coughlin. He is a good man who will provide this House with spiritual guidance and counseling support necessary to bring us together again. Let me say to every leader of this House and to every Member of this House: let us embrace our new Chaplain, put this episode behind us, and move forward to do the people's business.

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RESIGNATION AS CHAPLAIN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD) laid before the House the following resignation from the House of Representatives:

OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, March 23, 2000.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: During the last 21 years it has been my privilege and honor to serve as Chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives. I came to the House with a view that the practice of politics can be a noble vocation and should be considered a high calling and I leave with that view strengthened and with my admiration enhanced for the people who serve in government.

I write now to inform you that effective Thursday, March 23, 2000, I resign my office as Chaplain of the House of Representatives.

It has been a singular opportunity to be elected to the position of Chaplain and now to be named Chaplain Emeritus, as I have sought to serve all the Members of the House and to honor their political and religious traditions. The friendships that have begun here have nourished my life and my work and I leave with appreciation for our years together and with a salute to the opportunities of the future.

With every good wish, I remain.

Sincerely,

JAMES D. FORD,
Chaplain.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, and with regret, the resignation is accepted.

Mr. KLECZKA. Reserving the right to object, Mr. Speaker, I have an inquiry of the Chair. Is the Chair prepared to allot some time for this side of the aisle to be heard on this issue?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain requests, and it depends on what the request is.

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for up to 15 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Dakota?

There was no objection.

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the Chaplain's resignation is accepted, with regret.

There was no objection.

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CONCERNING THE CHAPLAIN SELECTION PROCESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) for 15 minutes.

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for allowing us to express our thoughts on this important matter. I would begin my thoughts by joining the Speaker's expression of regret about the resignation of Dr. Ford, who has served this institution so well and been a dear friend and an important chaplain to each of us. I thought that at some point, I might, as cochair of the chaplain selection process, have the opportunity to address the body as to the version, our version in the minority, of the events that have transpired throughout this chaplain selection process. I did not anticipate it coming today, in the middle of the budget vote; and I did not anticipate following the Speaker of the House, a person for whom I have considerable regard relative to his obviously heartfelt remarks just delivered. My remarks are not prepared. I ask you to bear with me.

I want to convey a deep sense of sorrow and regret that a process that began so honorably by the Speaker has ended in this fashion. Clearly, Speaker HASTERT wanted to capture the bipartisan efforts of other Speakers as the chaplain was selected but improve upon it. So when Speaker O'Neill asked the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations to go and agree on a chaplain that he might then appoint, that was bipartisanship. It could have been improved upon and Speaker HASTERT set upon a process that did improve upon it. It had even broader involvement, eight minority, eight majority. We were even given a cochair opportunity. We were very, very pleased and heartened by this gesture by the Speaker, because we believe that the chaplain is the chaplain of the House, not the Speaker's chaplain, not the majority chaplain, but the chaplain for all of us.

We advanced with the work, and it was considerable. Thirty-eight resumes to pore through. We culled it down in a process that had more comity and agreement across the party aisle to 17 interviews. Going through the hours of interviews, we developed friendships across party aisles, members of the committee. I so enjoyed working with my cochair, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BLILEY), and each of the members, majority and minority alike.

□ 1630

We then got it down to six semifinalists working toward the list of three. And while the Speaker is absolutely correct, his letter to us says send up to three names, the discussion throughout was to send three names. And we did not seriously consider sending less than three names.

As the final balloting occurred, even though this had been a process utterly without partisanship, there were, and it is not surprising, party distinctions in the relative support behind the candidates.

The candidate that finished fourth had only Democrat support. The candidate that finished third, Dr. Wright, had Republican support, with 1½ Democrat votes and a token showing across the party aisle. Two candidates, Dr. Dvorak and Father O'Brien, had significant bipartisan support, with Father O'Brien having the first showing in terms of vote totals.

We did not rank these candidates. We decided not to rank them. Ranking involves making a judgment, who is the best one, who is the second best one. We thought all three were qualified individuals, but what was important was the bipartisan consensus behind them.

Again, this is the chaplain of the House. It was a bipartisan process; and, therefore, the degree of consensus behind the final three is very important to us in the selection process, because this determines really the candidates that were able to capture support across the party aisle.

In this respect, in my presentation to the Speaker, the Minority Leader, as they began their work of the final committee of three, I indicated that Father O'Brien had had the most support; that Dr. Dvorak had the second level of support; that Dr. Wright had the third level of support.

I believed that the discussions that followed also captured this sense of consensus behind O'Brien, consensus behind Dvorak, not consensus behind Wright. So there were two meetings, as the Speaker just indicated, largely because they did not come to closure the first time. And the second time, in a divided vote, we in the minority know how divided votes go, you lose them. And the selection was made, Dr. Wright; not a consensus selection.

Here is where I really hope you can understand where our hard feelings on this matter arise. We are asked to participate. We willingly participated. We cared a great deal about the chap-

laincy, and we felt as though our view was ignored when the final decision was made. Majority only, once again. We felt that. We believed that.

You may disagree with that interpretation, but that is what we believed. Others had another feeling as well, and that is that in the passing over of the top candidate, a Roman Catholic priest, there had to be some other motives that were at issue that were untoward. Frankly, I did not have that view.

I felt that the problem was ignoring the bipartisan consensus of the candidate, that it did not have bipartisan consensus. We did not ask Dr. Wright to our caucus because Dr. Wright was not the issue for us. The process was the issue. The process was the problem.

In reacting to how the Speaker has resolved this matter, we look forward to getting to know Father Coughlin, if I have the name right. He is an individual we have not met. I think we can do better than this going forward.

I would ask each of us to seriously consider a resolution that will be offered this week by the gentleman from California (Mr. DOOLEY) that would call for the selection of the chaplain to be much in the same way as the selection of Inspector General.

At the end of the process, two votes, two for the majority, two for the minority. This is the chaplain of the House. This individual will be our minister. This individual will be our counselor. This individual will be our friend, not just the Speaker, not just the majority, but all of us.

And so next time, we will never let this happen again, next time. I would ask that we pass this resolution, changing the rules by which we deal with the chaplain and so that both sides have equal say.

Perhaps my deepest regret from this is, I felt a lot of good could come from the institution of the chaplain. I still have that hope for the institution and would only echo the Speaker's comments relative to the chaplain and what the chaplain might mean to this institution.

I look forward to working collectively under the newly announced chaplain and with the chaplains to come in the future, should I still be a Member of this body. I do think it might be one institution that can play an important role in restoring a greater degree of civility and trust between us.

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. POMEROY. I yield to the gentleman from Missouri.

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I would like to say a few things in regard to what the Speaker said. First, nothing in anyone's mind today is anything but concern for Dr. Wright. I am sorry that it has come to this. And I would hope that we would welcome the new Chaplain that has been appointed by the Speaker and try our level best