

# ATHEISTS LOSE ON HOUSE CHAPLAIN LAWSUIT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a federal court ruling upholding prayer invocations in Congress:

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a militant atheist organization, lost in its bid to offer a non-prayer invocation on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The House begins each legislative day with a prayer—"a practice," U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer noted, "that originated during the first Continental Congress and continues today."

FFRF president Dan Barker sought to instead deliver a secular invocation, and sued the House chaplain, Jesuit Father Patrick Conroy, for not inviting him to do so.

Judge Collyer, however, upheld Father Conroy. "The legislative prayer practice of the House of Representatives is consistent with the decisions of the Supreme Court and this Circuit, as well as the Rules of the House," she wrote on October 11. "A 'prayer' is required under the House rules and is consistent with the Establishment Clause."

The judge is also correct in affirming the long tradition of this practice. Indeed, the first U.S. House chaplain was appointed by none other than George Washington.

But tradition—especially tradition based on America's Judeo-Christian heritage—is something the atheists at FFRF cannot abide. It is great news that their attack on this tradition has been rebuffed in federal court.

Having played a key role in 2000 in securing the appointment of the House's first Catholic chaplain, Father Daniel

Coughlin, the Catholic League is particularly pleased to commend his successor, Father Conroy, for standing firm and winning this victory over militant atheism.