

CONFESSIONAL SEAL AT RISK IN UTAH

Utah Rep. Angela Romero, a Democrat, is sponsoring a bill that would gut the seal of Confession. She maintains that it is necessary because priests learn of the sexual abuse of minors in confession and do not report this to the authorities.

In a January 13 letter to Rep. Romero, Bill Donohue wrote:

“I have two questions for you.

“Speaking about the victims of sexual abuse, you have said, ‘Their perpetrators went to confession, confided in a religious leader, and nothing ever happened.’ What evidence do you have for making this remark?

“Last year I asked a state lawmaker in California the same question. He sponsored a similar bill and, like you, he made a comment almost identical to the one you made. He could not offer any evidence. After we waged a vigorous campaign against him, he withdrew his bill.

“The second question is this: Why are you seeking to breach the priest-penitent exemption, but are not seeking to violate the lawyer-client privilege or the exemption afforded psychologists and their patients? Do they not learn of sexual abuse behind closed doors?”

We asked those who receive our emails to contact the Utah Speaker of the House, Rep. Brad Wilson, seeking his help in opposing this bill. Here is how he responded:

“I have serious concerns about this bill and the effects it could have on religious leaders as well as their ability to counsel members of their congregation. I do not support this bill in its current form and—unless significant changes are

made to ensure the protection of religious liberties—I will be voting against this bill.” (His emphasis.)

Rep. Romero, however, doubled down, saying she is going forward with her bill, accusing Donohue of making a “soft threat.” She was obviously referring to the following concluding portion of Donohue’s January 10 letter:

“You are treading on dangerous territory. When the government seeks to police the sacraments of the Catholic Church—or encroach on the tenets and practices of any world religion—it is gearing up for a court fight. The First Amendment secures religious liberty, and that entails separation of church and state.”

Donohue stood by that statement. Regarding her remark, she moved well beyond the “threat” stage when she introduced a bill that attacks a sacrament of the Catholic Church—and there is nothing “soft” about that. Now she is claiming victim status because of a pushback by Catholics. What did she expect? That Catholics would allow an agent of the state to trample on their constitutionally protected rights?

Here is what Romero told the media. “Am I against organized religion? No. I’m Catholic. Maybe this is a little more personal for me. I’ve had victims here in Utah, people who have experienced and sexual abuse and child abuse. Their perpetrators were protected by a religious institutions. I have a problem with that.” [This is exactly the way she was quoted.]

We have a problem with so-called Catholics telling us they are not against the Catholic Church when they seek to destroy one of their sacraments. That gets real personal. As for the perpetrators, there is no evidence—Donohue asked her to give it to him—showing that breaking the seal of Confession would result in prosecuting molesters.

It is a red herring, a contrived pretext that would allow the

government to effectively cause the Sacrament of Reconciliation to implode. No practicing Catholic would ever sponsor such a bill, nor would a member of the faithful from any other religion.