

COURTS NIX PENTAGON GAG RULE

In a significant ruling, a federal judge struck down Pentagon orders prohibiting military chaplains from urging parishioners to write to the Congress expressing their desire to see the President's veto of the partial-birth abortion bill overturned. At stake was the constitutional right to freedom of speech.

The whole controversy erupted last June when Rev. Msgr. Aloysius R. Callahan, Chancellor of the Archdiocese for Military Services, wrote to Catholic priests asking them to abide by a directive from the bishops that requested all priests to ask their parishioners to write to the Congress over this issue. Before long, a Pentagon order came down prohibiting this action.

When the gag order was issued, the Catholic League protested with news releases and a letter to Pentagon officials. But the real hero in this case was Kevin Hasson of the Becket Fund. It was Hasson who took the government to court and ultimately prevailed.

U.S. District Judge Stanley Sporkin said in his ruling, "What we have here is the government's attempt to override the Constitution and the laws of the land by a directive that clearly interferes with military chaplains' free exercise and free speech rights, as well as those of their congregants."

The league is delighted with the outcome and offers its sincere congratulations to Kevin Hasson.