

GEPHARDT OFFERS HISTORY OF HOUSE CHAPLAIN PROCESS

In a March 8 letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt recounts how the House Chaplain issue unfolded. In doing so, he provides an important service: it is now possible to match what Gephardt has said about the process with statements from Hastert and House Majority Leader Dick Armey.

Catholic League president William Donohue comments on this development:

“According to Gephardt, before the House Chaplain process began, Hastert and Armey were advised of the ‘importance of a consensus candidate.’ He stresses that after the names of the three candidates were put forward, the co-chairmen of the selection committee, Rep. Bliley and Rep. Pomeroy, briefed the three of them; then Gephardt met with the Democratic members of the selection committee. It is significant what he said next: ‘At this point there was no doubt that, while the formal transmittal letter did not rank the three candidates, the clear choice of a bipartisan majority of the selection panel, including its Chairman and Ranking Democratic Member, was Father O’Brien.’ This is exactly what the Catholic League has been saying all along—it was well-known that O’Brien was the top choice.

“Gephardt says that while he could have supported any of the three candidates, he ‘felt no hesitation whatsoever in concluding that I could support the candidate preferred by the selection committee.’ Then he met with Hastert and Armey and they told him they wanted Rev. Charles Wright. At that point, Gephardt told the nine Democratic members of the panel of the Wright selection and then reported back to Hastert and Armey ‘their perplexed reaction,’ adding that Wright was not a

consensus candidate, but that O'Brien or Rev. Robert Dvorak were. A few days later Wright was chosen.

"If Gephardt's account is erroneous, Hastert and Armey should publicly challenge him. If it's accurate, they have some explaining to do."