

HOUSE CHAPLAIN MESS GROWS

John Feehery, spokesman for House Speaker Dennis Hastert, is reported as saying in today's edition of *USA Today* that neither Hastert nor Rep. Dick Armey knew that Father Timothy O'Brien was the top choice of the selection committee to be the new House Chaplain.

In another development, Auxiliary Bishop Richard J. Sklba of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has written to Hastert asking the House leadership to "reconsider their conclusion." Bishop Sklba also said that "The rationale offered to explain your final recommendation for House Chaplain is not persuasive." Catholic League president William Donohue agreed:

"Bishop Sklba is right—a persuasive case to reject Father O'Brien has not been made. Here's one reason why. We are to believe that neither Hastert nor Armey knew that O'Brien was the top pick of the selection committee. But on Dec. 2, the *New York Times* wrote that Rep. Pomeroy and Rep. Bliley (the co-chairs of the committee) said that all three—Hastert, Armey and Gephardt—knew that O'Brien was the top choice. On the same day, AP reported that officials in both parties 'made it clear' that O'Brien was first. On Dec. 3, the *Boston Globe* said that Rep. Anna Eshoo confessed that Democrats on the committee informed Gephardt of their preference and that they were certain he shared this with the others.

"On Jan. 10, *Roll Call* said that aides to Gephardt insisted that all three were aware that O'Brien was the top pick; it also said that when Pomeroy and Bliley met with Hastert and Gephardt, they told them that O'Brien was number one. On Jan. 12, Copley News Service said that Hastert and Armey knew 'by word of mouth' that O'Brien was first. On Feb. 1, AP reported that Pomeroy said all three knew O'Brien placed first; ditto Feb. 8. On Feb. 9, Gannett reported that Sue Harvey, spokesman for Gephardt, said all three knew O'Brien was first. On Feb.

12, the *Washington Post* wrote that Pomeroy said he orally conveyed O'Brien's first place showing to Hastert and Gephardt. Moreover, Ted Van der Meid, Hastert's counsel, counted the votes. None of this adds up."