

# PENTAGON GAGS SPEECH OF CATHOLICS

In an unusual move, the Pentagon sought to muzzle the free speech of Roman Catholics. The issue was whether Catholics in the Air Force, Army and Navy could participate in an appeal by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) to protest President Clinton's veto of the bill banning partial-birth abortions. The NCCB asked Catholics to send postcards to their representatives and senators urging them to override President Clinton's veto of the bill.

Rev. Msgr. Aloysius R. Callahan, Chancellor of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, wrote to Catholic priests in the military asking them to urge lay Catholics to participate in the protest. On June 7, all senior chaplains were notified that they were barred from doing what the NCCB requested.

The Catholic League registered its complaint as follows:

"It is outrageous that the Pentagon would try to silence the free speech rights of Catholics in the military. It is one thing to say that those in the military should avoid working in an election campaign for Republicans or Democrats, quite another to say that enlisted men and women have no right to send a postcard to their Congressmen and Senators protesting a piece of legislation. And we are not talking about a matter of national security, something the Pentagon might legitimately seek to control. But we are talking about life and death."

The league asked President Clinton to raise his objections to the Pentagon edict.