

# REPUBLICANS DOGGED BY HOUSE CHAPLAIN ISSUE

The controversy over the new House chaplain continues to dog the Republicans. Instead of taking steps to put this issue behind them, they have allowed it to fester.

The Catholic League has become increasingly incensed over Republican duplicity and efforts by conservatives to smear Father Timothy O'Brien. William Donohue has been in conversation with Father O'Brien from the beginning and has been surprised by the viciousness of the assault on his character.

Myths regarding Father O'Brien abound. Contrary to what has been said, he never lobbied for the job. Worse, one of those responsible for making this charge said that the alleged lobbying took place in February or March of 1999, yet Father O'Brien never learned that the House Chaplain post was open until June 25, 1999.

Those opposed to Father O'Brien have not stopped lobbying the Catholic League. Indeed, the lobbying intensified to the point where the league accused Republican operatives of crossing church-state lines.

Joe Eule, chief of staff for Republican Representative J.D. Hayworth of Arizona, told league director of communications Pat Scully that "You guys had better come around on this." As we pointed out to the media, if someone from the Church, or from the Catholic League, were to call a congressman's office and say that, we would never hear the end of it.

We also heard from former congressman Michael Patrick Flanagan of Illinois (he was "deputized" by House Speaker Dennis Hastert). He told us we had stepped into the "absolute major leagues of power politics," and we told him we didn't need any

of his lectures.

To make things even more bizarre, House Majority Leader Dick Armey told reporters that he had no idea what religion Father O'Brien was when he voted. When we offered proof that this could not be true, his communications director said this was not what her boss meant.

ABC's "World News Tonight" did a segment on this subject giving a fair portrayal of the league's work. Perhaps our favorite story was the one in the Newark *Star Ledger* by Paul Mulshine. He said that Hastert and Armey "are engaged in a shouting match" with Bill Donohue. "Sometimes league officials get carried away," Mulshine wrote, "but that's all the more reason that no politician in his right mind would get them started."