

REPUBLICANS CAN'T SHAKE ANTI-CATHOLIC LEGACY

The quest for a new House chaplain began in June when an 18-member committee of Republicans and Democrats (evenly split) sifted through more than 40 resumes. After interviewing 17 candidates, and selecting six as semifinalists, the top three names were submitted to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, House Majority Leader Dick Armey and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt; they were permitted to name any one of the finalists.

Their choice was Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian minister. Rev. Wright, however, placed third in the committee voting. The committee's first choice was Rev. Timothy J. O'Brien, a Catholic priest and professor at Marquette University. Rev. Wright's name will now be submitted to the full House for approval in January.

William Donohue, Catholic League president, voiced his concerns today:

"When Father Timothy O'Brien was vetoed as House chaplain, the central question left on the table was the reasoning that the House leaders employed when they rejected the overwhelming advice of their colleagues.

"To say that most members of the House would be more comfortable with a Protestant minister than with a Catholic priest—which is precisely what Dennis Hastert and Dick Armey are reported as saying—is to say that Catholic priests need not apply for this post. As Hastert and Armey know, never in the history of the U.S. has there been a Catholic priest chosen for House chaplain. More germane, never in the history of the U.S. has any priest been recommended as the candidate of first choice by the selection committee for House chaplain.

This raises the question, If not now, when?

“Those who led the fight against Father O’Brien were mostly Republicans. Most disturbing, some of their questions evinced a bigotry that has dogged their party for decades. We will now write to every congressman asking him to reexamine this matter when it comes to him for a vote in January.”