

UNIV. OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN SPONSORS RELIGION; STATE SEN. GILDA Z. JACOBS DEFENDS IT

Last week, Catholic League president Bill Donohue wrote to Michigan lawmakers regarding news reports that the University of Michigan-Dearborn is planning to spend \$25,000 for footbaths so that Muslim students can practice their religion more easily. Of the lawmakers who have responded thus far, only one has defended this arrangement, State Sen. Gilda Z. Jacobs.

Jacobs told Donohue “it has been made clear to me that this is less a religious issue and more a health and safety issue.” She said currently Muslim students use “bathroom sinks” to wash their feet. She also said that the footbaths are being paid for by student tuition payments and not “the taxpayer-funded General Fund.” She further defended this policy by saying the school’s academic calendar accommodates Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter, and Jewish students are allowed to reschedule exams originally scheduled for Saturdays. She mentioned that the U.S. Postal Service does not have regular mail delivery on Sundays and that alcohol cannot be bought in Michigan on Sunday mornings.

Donohue responded as follows:

“Remedial education can resolve the problem of not knowing the difference between a shower stall and a sink, but education is no cure for dishonesty. Money is fungible, and that is why it is disingenuous for Jacobs to say that the taxpayers are not paying for the footbaths. Furthermore, every example Jacobs cited as analogous to funding the footbaths involves accommodation of religion—not sponsorship.

“Interestingly, Jacobs was only one of two senators to vote

against a bill in 2004 allowing religious and divinity students to win publicly funded scholarships. Jacobs said she was opposed to 'funding of seminaries.'

"Jacobs ends her letter to me by saying that she hopes 'religious intolerance' is not motivating critics of this scheme. We hope her defense of religious discrimination is based on ignorance and not malice. And we urge Catholics to take note of her duplicity."