
CHAPTER 12

Senate Chaplain

June 25, 1980*

Mr. President, today I shall speak about another of the elected officers of the Senate, the Senate chaplain.

Let me preface my statement on the chaplain by referring to a portion of the scriptures: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."¹

Mr. President, the Founding Fathers believed that God was the Ruler of the universe and that the destinies of nations were guided by His hand. Faith in God was their guiding light. We can see from the Mayflower Compact and the other great documents in our early history—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States—a spiritual awareness on the part of the men and women who founded this nation. This spiritual sense runs throughout the nation's history as an unbroken thread. In times of adversity, it has given strength to those who have built this great country.

I point, as an example, to Benjamin Franklin, who rose at the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787, at a time when the convention seemed likely to fall apart and end without success. Addressing the assembly, which General George Washington chaired, the aged but still eloquent and witty Franklin declared:

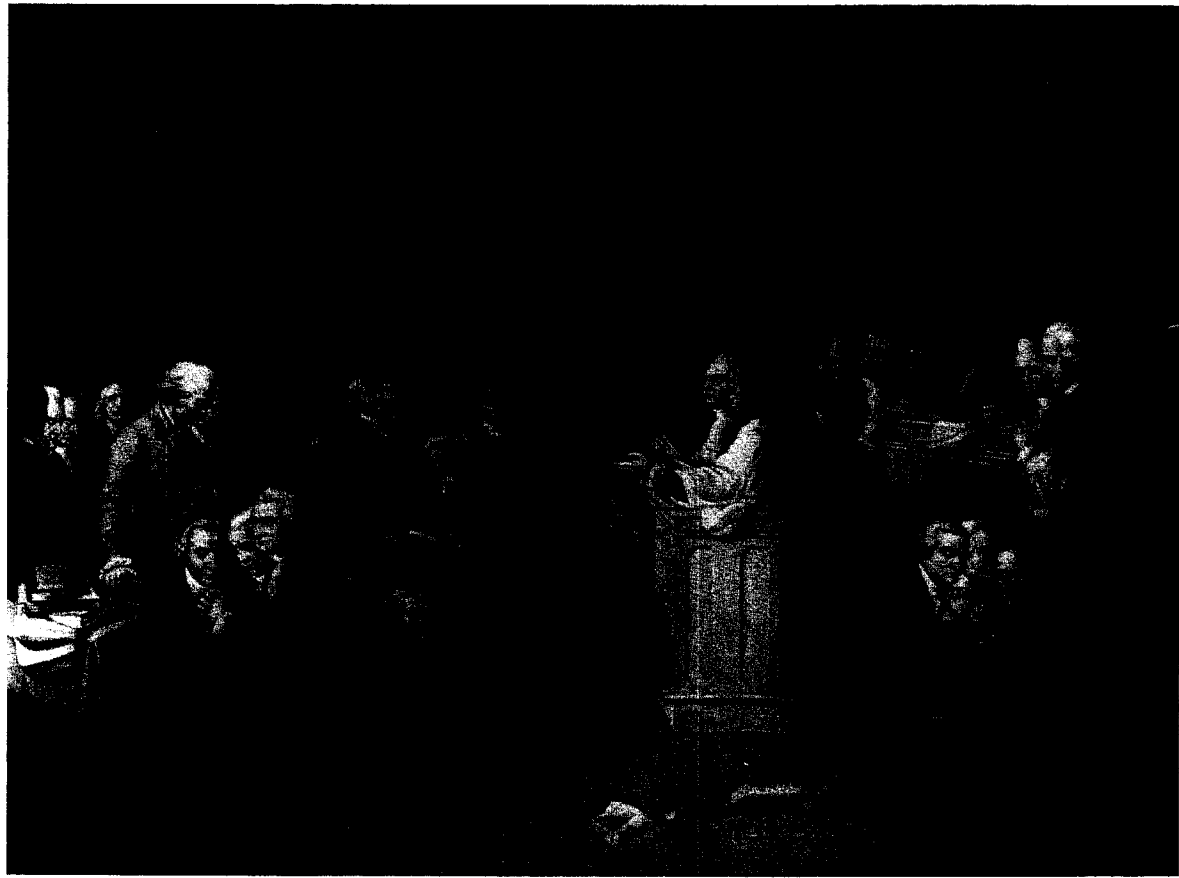
I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that *God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?

Franklin continued, observing that, unless the founders drew upon spiritual strength for guidance, "we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel."²

While the convention was surprised to hear such views expressed by Franklin, a Deist, the sentiments he voiced were shared by most of his colleagues in Philadelphia that June. We should continue to be mindful of that spiritual awareness on the part of our forefathers as the chaplain opens our daily sessions with prayer.

The custom of opening sessions of the Senate and House with prayer is a very old one. Indeed, it dates back to the Continental Congress, before the Senate and House even existed. The Continental Congress first met in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774. When the members convened on the second day, the fiery radical from Massachusetts, Samuel Adams, was among those who rose and proposed to open the session with prayer. The suggestion touched off a heated debate over the religious diversity of the colonies, which would prevent selection of a chaplain from

* Updated April 1989



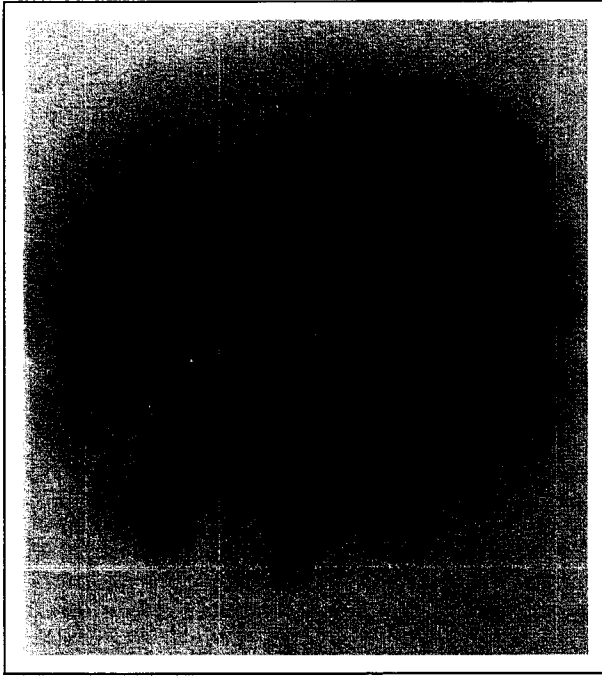
The custom of opening congressional sessions with an invocation dates from September 1774, when the Reverend Jacob Duché led the Continental Congress in prayer. *Library of Congress*

any one denomination. The furor was not stilled until Adams delivered a stirring speech in which he proclaimed, as John Adams reconstructed the events for Abigail, "he was no bigot, and could hear a prayer from a gentleman of piety and virtue, who was at the same time a friend to his country." After this emotional plea, Adams' motion carried, and the Reverend Jacob Duché of Philadelphia's Christ Church came to the chamber to lead the Congress in prayer.³

From Philadelphia, John Adams once wrote home to his wife that "the business of the Congress is tedious beyond expression." On this particular day, however, he reported

to her that he had never seen a more moving spectacle. After reading the formal Episcopal service, Duché broke into an extemporaneous prayer, which "filled the bosom of every man present. I must confess, I never heard a better prayer, or one so well pronounced." The prayer, Adams informed Abigail, "has had an excellent effect upon every body here." The appreciative members appointed Mr. Duché as their first chaplain.⁴

When the first Senate under the new Constitution, meeting in New York City, finally mustered a quorum of twelve members on April 6, 1789, one of its first orders of business was the matter of selecting a chaplain.



The Senate selected the Right Reverend Samuel Provoost, Episcopal Bishop of New York, as its first chaplain.

Library of Congress

On April 7, a committee composed of Senators Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, Richard Bassett of Delaware, Caleb Strong of Massachusetts, and William Maclay of Pennsylvania was formed to confer with a similar House committee. Their task was "to prepare a system of rules to govern the two Houses in cases of conference, and to take under consideration the manner of electing Chaplains."⁵

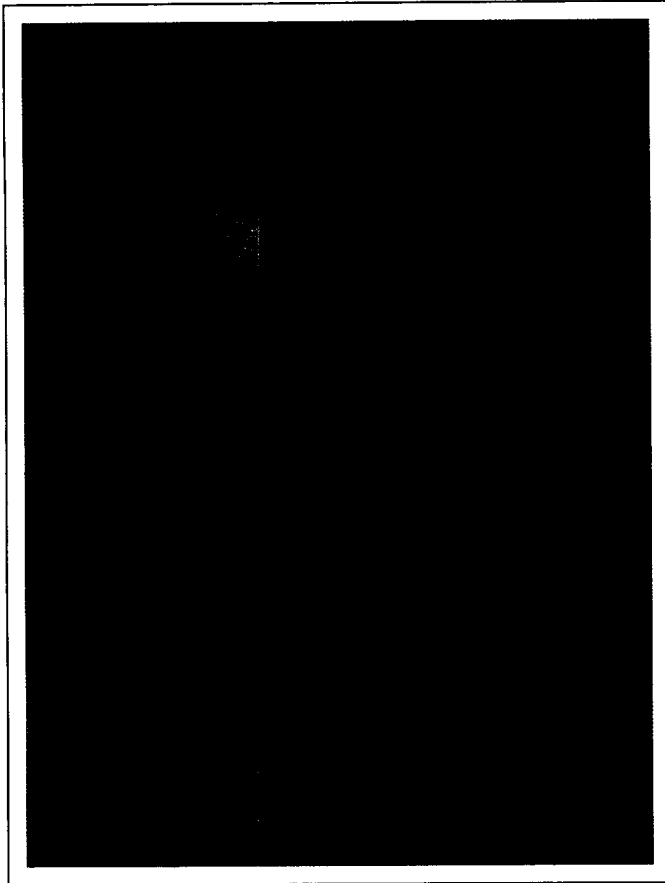
This committee reported back in just seven days with a recommendation to elect two chaplains of different denominations—one from the Senate and one from the House—who would alternate between the chambers on a weekly basis. The recommendation was accepted and, on April 25, the Senate chose the Right Reverend Samuel Provoost, Episcopal Bishop of New York, as its first chaplain. Five days later, in his new capacity, the Reverend Mr. Provoost presided over a most historic occasion. On April 30, 1789, George Washington stood before the members of

the new Congress at Federal Hall and solemnly took the oath of office as the first president of the United States. Immediately following the ceremony, President Washington, his vice president, John Adams, and the members of the Senate and House proceeded to St. Paul's Chapel, where Chaplain Provoost led them in a prayer asking for Divine Providence to watch over the new government.⁶

The Senate's first chaplain was as ardent a patriot as the men he served. Born in New York City in 1742, he was a member of the first graduating class of King's College, now Columbia University, in 1758. After graduation, young Provoost sailed for England to study for the Episcopal priesthood. He returned to New York as assistant minister at prestigious Trinity Church. Provoost, however, was a passionate Whig, and his sympathy for the colonies against English rule did not sit well with his wealthy, loyalist congregation. Before long, his patriotism cost him his parish. During the Revolution, Provoost and several of his neighbors in Dutchess County, New York, narrowly escaped capture and death at the hands of the British. It must have been very satisfying to the minister when, after the British evacuated New York and his former Tory parishioners had fled, the little band of patriotic vestrymen who remained invited him to return as head of Trinity Church.⁷

Samuel Provoost served as the Senate's chaplain until Congress moved on to Philadelphia in the winter of 1790. For the next ten years, while the Senate met in Congress Hall, Senate sessions were opened with prayers by the Senate's second chaplain, the Right Reverend William White, first Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania.

In 1800, Congress moved to its permanent home along the Potomac. On November 27, in a room one floor below me, now the beautifully restored old Supreme Court chamber,



Bishop William White of Pennsylvania served as the Senate's second chaplain.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania

the Senate elected its third chaplain, the Right Reverend John Thomas Claggett, first Episcopal Bishop of Maryland.⁸

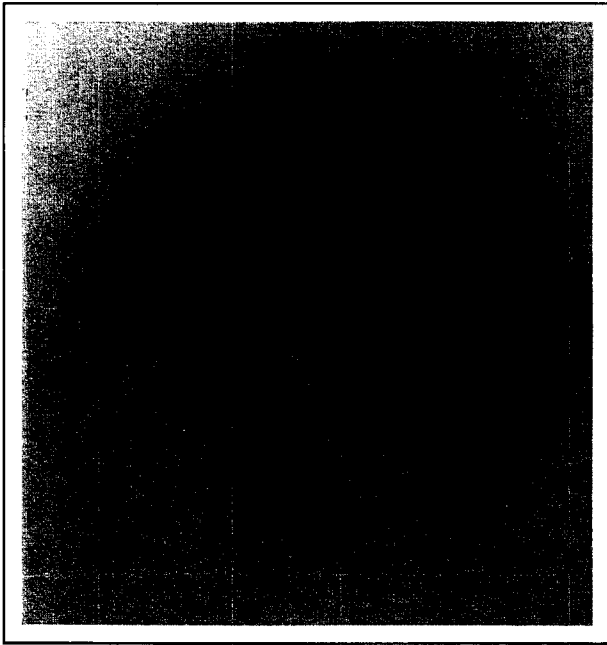
When the seat of government moved to Washington, the nation's capital was little more than a tiny village. In 1800, it offered only two churches: a small frame Catholic chapel on F Street and an Episcopal church, formerly a tobacco warehouse, at the base of Capitol Hill. Although more churches sprang up as the population grew in the early nineteenth century, the House of Representatives chamber, which today serves as Statuary Hall, was the scene of some of the city's most interesting Sunday services.

These religious services were conducted alternately by the chaplains of the Senate

and the House, or by distinguished visiting clergymen, and they were open to the public. From contemporary accounts, we know that the public took full advantage of the opportunity to come to the Capitol, though it is not always clear that worship was foremost in their minds. In 1837, recalling the city's first three decades, the brilliant Margaret Bayard Smith wrote:

I have called these Sunday assemblies in the capitol, a *congregation*, but the almost exclusive appropriation of that word to religious assemblies, prevents its being a descriptive term as applied in the present case, since the gay company who thronged the H[ouse] [of] R[epresentatives] looked very little like a religious assembly. The occasion presented for display was not only a novel, but a favourable one for the youth, beauty and fashion of the city, Georgetown and environs. The members of Congress, gladly gave up their seats for such fair auditors, and either lounged in the lobbies, or round the fire places, or stood beside the ladies of their acquaintance. . . . Smiles, nods, whispers, nay sometimes tittering marked their recognition of each other, and beguiled the tedium of the service. . . . The musick was as little in union with devotional feelings, as the place. The marine-band, were the performers. Their scarlet uniform, their various instruments, made quite a dazzling appearance in the gallery. The marches they played were good and inspiring, but in their attempts to accompany the psalm-singing of the congregation, they completely failed and after a while, the practice was discontinued—it was *too* ridiculous.⁹

Mrs. Smith also told a good story about the Senate's thirteenth chaplain, the Reverend John Brackenridge, a stern Presbyterian who served from 1811 to 1814, years that saw the new nation embroiled in another war with England. Chaplain Brackenridge used the forum of the Sunday services in the House chamber in the summer of 1814 to deliver a sermon that proved quite prophetic. His subject was the observance of the Sabbath, and he launched into a vehement denunciation of those who violated its holiness. According to Mrs. Smith:



Bishop John Thomas Claggett of Maryland became the Senate's chaplain when Congress moved to Washington in 1800. *Maryland Historical Society*

He unshrinkingly taxed those then listening to him, with a desecration of this holy day, by their devoting it to amusement—to visiting and parties, emphatically condemning the dinner-parties given at the white-house, then addressing himself to the members of Congress, accused them of violating the day, by laws they had made, particularly the carrying the mail on the sabbath.

Brackenridge ended dramatically:

"It is not the people who will suffer for these enormities. You, the law-givers, who are the cause of this crime, will in your public capacity suffer for it. Yes, it is the *government* that will be punished, and as, with Nineveh of old, it will not be the habitations of the people, but your temples and your palaces that will be burned to the ground."

At the time of John Brackenridge's sermon, no one had the remotest apprehension that the British might ever reach Washington. But shortly thereafter, on August 24, 1814, British troops did capture this city and set fire to this very building, as well as to the

White House. Dolley Madison told Mrs. Smith that, upon her return to the city after the British had left, she chanced to meet Chaplain Brackenridge one day and said to him, "I little thought, Sir, when I heard that threatening sermon of yours, that its denunciation would so soon be realized." "Oh, Madam," Brackenridge replied, "I trust this chastening of the Lord, may not be in vain."¹⁰

Until 1853, the House and Senate went on regularly electing their chaplains. But in that year, the House received several memorials requesting that the offices of chaplain in the "army, navy, at West Point, at Indian stations, and in both houses of Congress, be abolished." The memorials argued that the position of chaplain, supported by tax dollars, violated the constitutional provision for separation of church and state. They were referred to the House Judiciary Committee, which, in March 1854, reported that its members were "not prepared to come to the conclusion desired by the memorialists," and proceeded to explain why. After a lengthy discourse on the constitutionality of the chaplaincy, the committee declared:

If there be a God who hears prayer—as we believe there is—we submit, that there never was a deliberative body that so eminently needed the fervent prayers of righteous men as the Congress of the United States. There never was another representative assembly that had so many and so widely different interests to protect and to harmonize, and so many local passions to subdue. One member feels charged to defend the rights of the Atlantic, another of the Pacific coast; one urges the claims of constituents on the borders of the torrid, another on the borders of the frigid zone; while hundreds have the defence of local and varied interests stretching across an entire continent. . . . If wisdom from above . . . be given in answer to the prayers of the pious, then Congress need those devotions, as they surely need to have their views of personal importance daily chastened by the reflection that they are under the government of a Supreme Power, that rules not for one locality or one time, but governs a world by gener-

al laws, subjecting all motives and acts to an omniscient scrutiny, and holds all agents to their just rewards by an irresistible power.¹¹

And there the matter ended for the time.

Several years later, there arose a more serious, internal challenge to the offices of Senate and House chaplain. In 1855, the House decided to discontinue its practice of electing a regular chaplain. Instead, various members of the District of Columbia clergy were invited to take turns opening each session and preaching the sermon on Sundays. In 1857, the Senate followed suit. The reasons behind this change appear in the floor discussion recorded in the *Congressional Globe*. Senator James Mason of Virginia summed up the problem:

Every Senator, I have no doubt, has had some experience (I think it is very unfortunate, but perhaps it is incident to the subject-matter) that a sort of competition has grown up by the usage of the Senate in electing a Chaplain, which I have thought is not altogether consistent with the office of a clergyman or a pastor. I will not say, by any means, a competition so much among the clergymen themselves, perhaps, as amongst Senators, who desire to prefer particular persons; but the fact is that it has become a matter of that kind, and it is not entirely agreeable to me, certainly, and I dare say is not to other Senators, to have that state of things existing.¹²

The appointment of the chaplain, as Senator Mason pointed out, had fallen into the realm of political patronage. At the beginning of each session, sometimes a dozen or more senators placed in nomination the names of favored clergymen.

Senator Mason had touched a sensitive nerve. Many senators rose to support his proposal for rotating local clergymen who would receive no salary. Senator Clement Clay of Alabama was one of the few to object, saying, "We should not 'muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.'" He did not think, as he put it, "in these degenerate

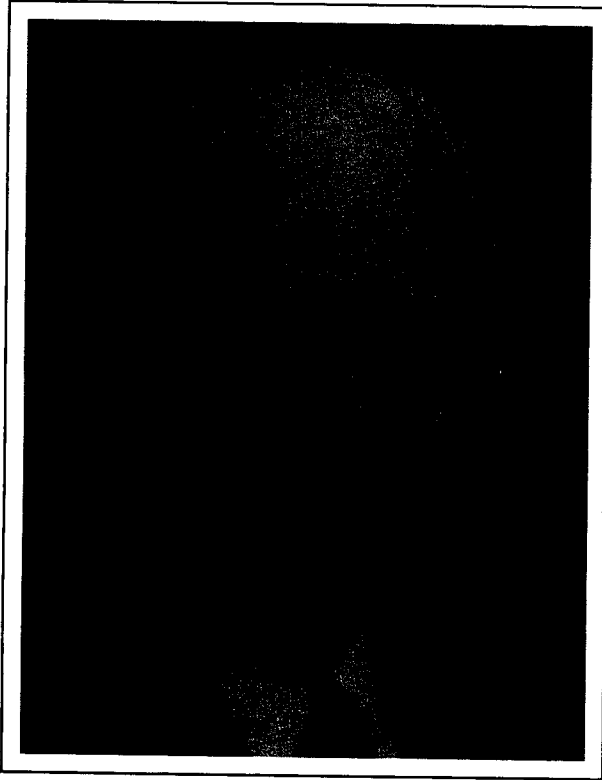
days," anyone would come to pray over the Senate for free. He felt that chaos would ensue and that "oftentimes we shall have to go to work without prayers." Despite Clay's objections, the Senate decided to try the new plan for one Congress.¹³

While the House experimented with the new system from 1855 to 1861, the Senate, after only two years, returned to its old practice of selecting an official chaplain. Had Senator Clay been right? Partly. It seems there had been problems arranging for an orderly succession of daily prayers by disparate individuals willing to volunteer their services. But Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts expressed another concern. In an eloquent plea to return to the old system, he said:

I know, sir, there was complaint in the Senate and in the country before we adopted the plan of inviting the clergymen of the city to officiate here. That grew out of electioneering; out of the fact that clergymen came to this city seeking the place of Chaplain here. The plan was adopted of inviting clergymen of Washington city to officiate, I think, for the purpose of correcting that evil. It has been corrected; but it seems to me that to bring the clergymen of this city without pay to the Capitol to officiate, is imposing a burden on them. Besides, these clergymen cannot become acquainted with us. We cannot look to them as we should look to a Chaplain of the Senate. I think the plan of the last Congress is a very poor substitute for the former plan of having a Chaplain of the body, to whom we can look and consider as such; a Chaplain who would become acquainted with us, and who would know the interests and wants of the body. I hope, therefore . . . that the Senate will elect a Chaplain.¹⁴

After only brief discussion, Senator Wilson's colleagues granted his request and adopted a resolution to elect a chaplain. They then proceeded to elect the Reverend Phineas Gurley, a Presbyterian of Washington, as the Senate's fortieth chaplain.

In more recent times, charges of "electioneering" have been raised about the chaplaincy, and some have complained about the



The Reverend Richard C. Halverson has served as Senate chaplain since 1981. *Office of the Senate Chaplain*

money spent for the chaplain's salary. But I think Senator Wilson understood the importance of the office. The Senate needs a chaplain who is well acquainted with it, who knows its interests and knows its members. Our current chaplain, the Reverend Richard C. Halverson, is the sixtieth individual to hold the office of chaplain of the Senate, and he is a good example of what I am talking about. He has been our chaplain for many years now, and during that time he has gotten to know the Senate and to know us, his flock.

During my three decades in the Senate, I have known three Senate chaplains: Dr. Halverson and his two immediate predecessors, the Reverend Edward Lee Roy Elson and the Reverend Frederick Brown Harris. I should now like to tell senators a little more about the first two of these chaplains who served during my time.

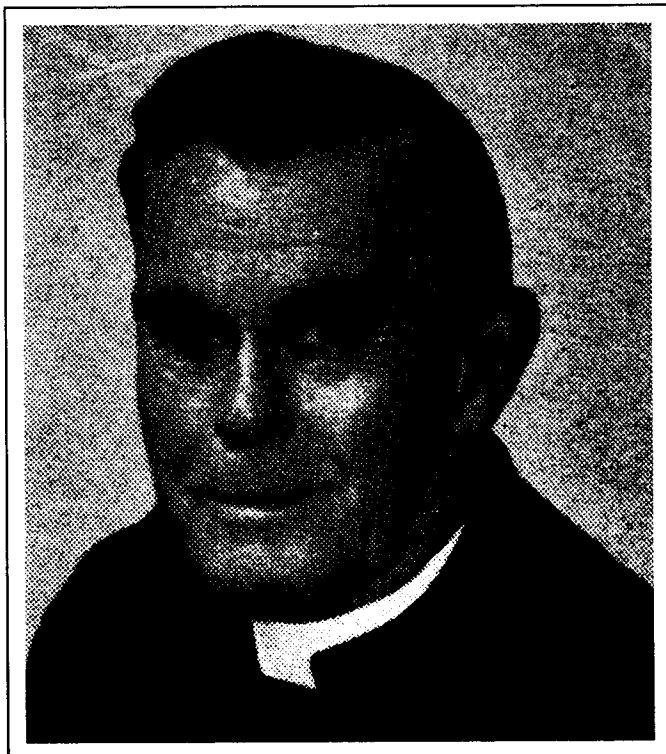
The very first day that I stood before the Senate was Wednesday, January 7, 1959. I was a green freshman in the Senate that day. Before my credentials were presented and before I took the oath of office, the session was opened with a prayer by Chaplain Harris. His words moved me deeply.

Summoned by a new year and a new session to face matters that pertain to the nation's welfare, before we talk to one another and to a listening world, we would turn to Thee, without whose guidance and help our feeble hands will fail and our striving will be losing.¹⁵

Although I was new to the Senate, the Reverend Mr. Harris had already been its chaplain for almost fifteen years and would continue for another decade. This tenure of nearly twenty-five years, beginning in 1942, was broken only by the two-year chaplaincy of the Reverend Peter Marshall from 1947 to 1949. Harris was thus the longest-serving chaplain in the Senate's history.

Tall, with gray hair and a lean, craggy face, the Reverend Frederick Brown Harris looked like just the man to lead such a diverse flock. He was born in England in 1883, the son of a minister, and came to the United States as a small boy. He was raised in New Jersey, studied for the Methodist ministry at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, and was ordained in 1923. In 1924, he was assigned to historic Foundry Methodist Church here in Washington and stayed on for thirty years, retiring in 1955.

Frederick Brown Harris once learned that his job as the Senate's chaplain was not without some peril. Around 1:30 p.m. on the afternoon of July 18, 1961, just after he had left the chamber, there was a terrible crash in the hallway. The whole chamber shook. Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island stopped speaking in mid-sentence. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield rushed into the hallway and took charge of the situation. An enormous temporary wall, covering the



The Reverend Frederick Brown Harris was the longest-serving Senate chaplain. *U.S. Senate Historical Office*

entire area where the public elevators are now located, had crashed, trapping and injuring several tourists and employees. Harris was one of the most seriously wounded, with two severe gashes over his eye and behind his ear. Six days later, however, after several stitches and a little rest, Chaplain Harris returned to the Senate.

My most vivid memory of the Reverend Mr. Harris is from that terrible day of November 22, 1963, when we learned that President Kennedy had been shot. The Chaplain rushed to the Hill when he heard the news. I was in the chamber when he arrived to pray with us, and I shall never forget his theme from the lines of one of my favorite poets, Edwin Markham:

And when he fell in whirlwind, he went
down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,

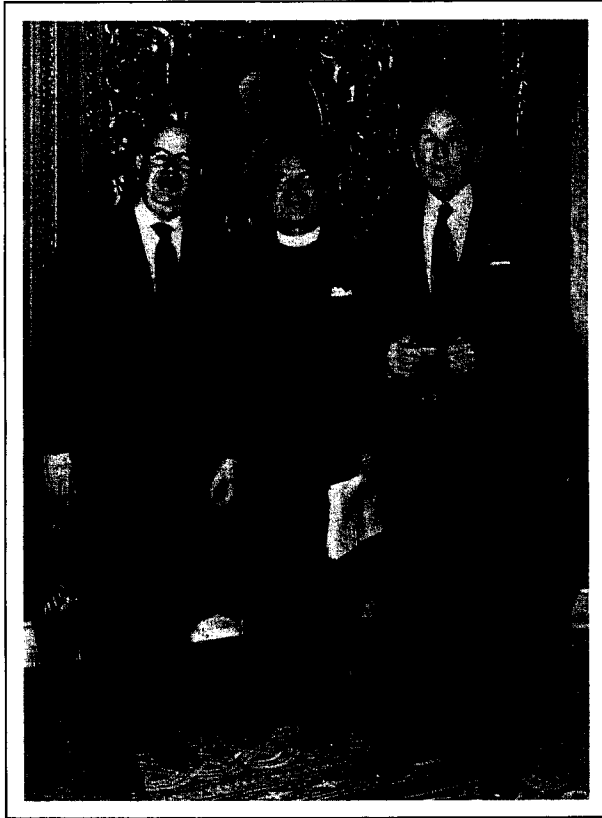
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the
sky.¹⁶

When Frederick Brown Harris retired as our chaplain in 1969, he was succeeded by the Reverend Edward Lee Roy Elson, who had originally planned to go to West Point but answered, instead, the call to the ministry. After serving as an army chaplain during World War II, he was called to Washington in 1946 as pastor of the National Presbyterian Church. A few years later, he officiated at a very special baptism. In February of 1953, he baptized President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the first president ever baptized while in office.

Elson told this story of the events leading up to that day. The president had been raised in a religious family belonging to the Church of the River Brethren, a small denomination that only baptizes adults. By the time Eisenhower was old enough to be baptized, he was traveling all over the country and, later, the world. During his 1952 campaign, several of his aides urged him to join a church but he replied, "I'd no sooner join a church during a campaign than I'd join a labor union." He said he would wait until it was clear he was acting out of conscience, not expediency, and shortly after his first inauguration, he sought out Chaplain Elson.

As chaplain, Elson introduced several important "firsts" into the Senate. In 1971, he invited the first woman minister to pray in the Senate, and, later, he invited the first nun, and then the first American Indian holy man, an eighty-three-year-old Sioux who brought his peace pipe.

The duties that chaplains, from Samuel Provoost through Richard Halverson, perform for us are not all written down, but they are numerous and have evolved over two centuries. Just about all the chaplain is required to do in the Senate chamber is to



The Reverend Edward Lee Roy Elson, Senate chaplain during the 1970's, appears here with Senators Hugh Scott, *left*, and Mike Mansfield.

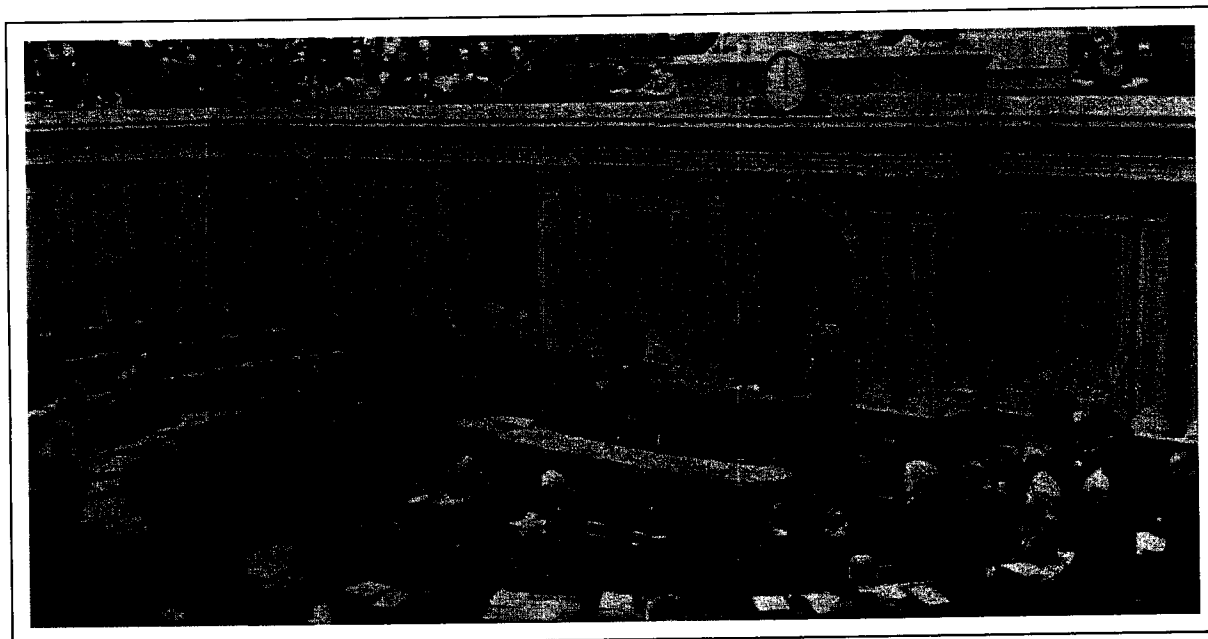
U.S. Senate Historical Office

open our daily deliberations with a prayer. Incidentally, before 1939, prayers were delivered only at the start of each new Legislative Day. Because Legislative Days—then as now—often ran for a number of calendar days, it was not unusual for many days to pass without an opening prayer. In February 1939, the Senate adopted a resolution which provided that “the Chaplain shall open each calendar day’s session of the Senate with prayer.” On February 29, 1960, the Senate adopted a resolution providing that, during round-the-clock continuous sessions, “the Presiding Officer shall temporarily suspend the business of the Senate at 12 o’clock noon each day for the . . . daily prayer by the Chaplain of the Senate.” Senators have, from time to time, delivered the prayer.¹⁷

The Reverend Peter Marshall once said he sometimes felt that the chaplain was a little like a bit of parsley garnishing the political platter. But his prayers could often help members who were caught up in their own immediate battles to put the nation’s needs into perspective. His prayer of June 17, 1947, is a case in point. Aware that the day’s schedule promised to bring heated debate over a host of relatively inconsequential items, Marshall began with this prayer: “Since we strain at gnats and swallow camels, give us a new standard of values and the ability to know a trifle when we see it and to deal with it as such.”¹⁸ This is a good example of what Peter Marshall believed was the unspoken rule regarding Senate prayers, “Keep it short!” He once noted, “I find that the Senators appreciate my prayers in inverse ratio to their length.”

In addition to the daily prayer, the chaplain schedules and instructs the many guest chaplains whom senators occasionally nominate to come before us. Although the number of guest chaplains is now limited to two per month, there was once no ceiling on the number. This prompted the Reverend Mr. Harris to note to Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson that he had been replaced seventeen times in just a few weeks. “Now look here, Reverend,” Senator Johnson consoled, “if you want me to call a halt to this sort of thing, you let me know, and we’ll just restrict the number of visiting preachers.” Harris did not remind Johnson that he already had two requests from the senator’s office on his desk requesting the privilege for two Texans.¹⁹

Another of the chaplain’s duties is to perform our weddings and, sadly, our funerals. Chaplain Harris once performed a wedding at a specially constructed altar in the Caucus Room of the Russell Building for a sixty-nine-year-old Western Union messenger and a sixty-year-old widow. During his term as



On February 21, 1939, the day the Senate began opening each daily session with a prayer, Senate Chaplain ZeBarney Thorne Phillips offered the invocation. *U.S. Senate Historical Office*

Senate chaplain, in addition to conducting the funerals for several senators, he also led the funerals of General Douglas MacArthur, Vice President Alben Barkley, and President Herbert Hoover. Chaplain Elson conducted the funerals of Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, and of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, as well as those for several of our former colleagues.

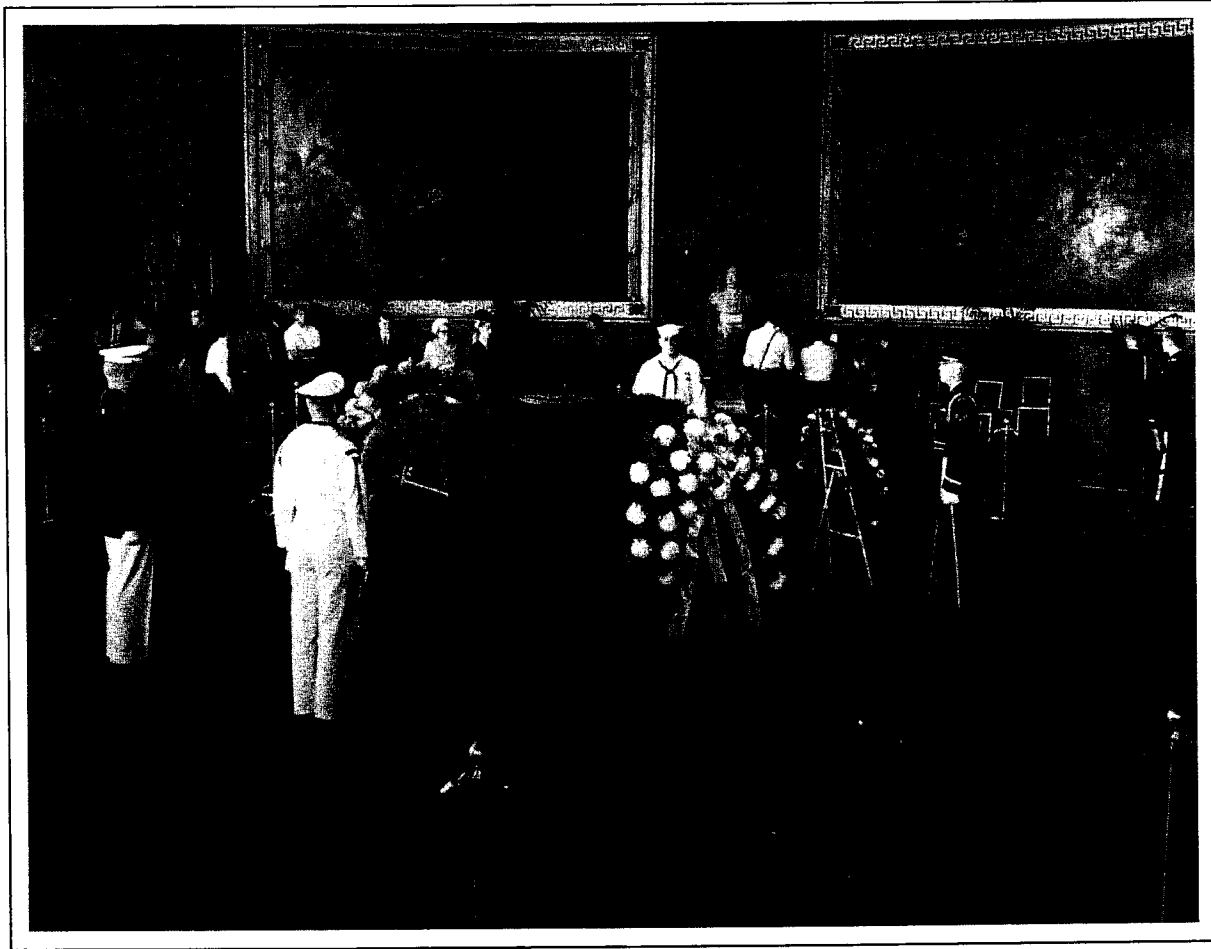
While a sad subject, the history of Senate funerals is an interesting one. The first senator to die in office was William Grayson of Virginia, who died on March 12, 1790, just a year after taking office. Although he had lived only fifty years, he had fought under Washington at the Battle of Monmouth and had been a member of the Continental Congress before coming to the Senate.

The first official action taken by the Senate on the death of one of its own was in 1799 when Senator Henry Tazewell of Virginia died. Since Tazewell died in Philadelphia, far from friends and family, his funeral

and burial at Christ Church in Philadelphia were supervised by a committee of his friends in the Senate.

From time to time, especially in the nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth century, the families of deceased senators have chosen to have the funeral services performed in the Senate chamber. With the casket placed in the open space before the dais, in front of the reporters' tables, the services were conducted by the chaplain of the Senate. Often, the president and his cabinet, justices, ambassadors, and members of the House joined senators in paying their respects to their fallen colleague. A doorkeeper announced the groups of dignitaries as they entered. When the services were concluded, a committee of senators would accompany the remains back home for burial.

One of the most elaborate of the more recent funerals in the chamber was that of Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas in 1937. At the time of his death, Senator Rob-



On September 10, 1969, the body of Senator Everett Dirksen lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda.

Architect of the Capitol

inson was the Democratic majority leader and had been a member of this body for twenty-four years. His friends were legion, and the chamber was overflowing with floral tributes. The most recent such funeral service in the chamber, conducted by Chaplain Harris, was that of Senator William Langer, whose family requested the privilege in 1959.

Senators have also been among the twenty-four individuals whose remains the nation has honored in the Rotunda of the Capitol. The first was Henry Clay of Kentucky, who lay in state in the Rotunda on

July 1, 1852, after a funeral service in the old Senate chamber down the hall. He was followed in 1874 by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and in 1875 by Vice President and former Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, who died in the Vice President's Room right outside this chamber. Senator John Logan of Illinois, whose funeral took place in this chamber, lay in state in the Rotunda in 1886, followed by President and former Senator Warren Harding of Ohio in 1923, Robert Taft, Sr., of Ohio in 1953, President and former Senator John F. Kennedy in 1963, Everett Dirksen of Illinois in 1969, President



Architect Benjamin Latrobe designed the massive sandstone cenotaphs that stand as memorials in Congressional Cemetery. *Library of Congress*

and former Senator Lyndon Johnson in 1973, Senator and former Vice President Hubert Humphrey in 1978, and, most recently, former Senator Claude Pepper in 1989.

A particularly impressive site to visit in this city is the burial ground of several of the early senators. I do not mean Arlington National Cemetery, but the less-well-known Congressional Cemetery at the far end of East Capitol Street. In 1817, the vestry of Washington's Christ Church set aside one hundred burial sites within its parish cemetery for the interment of members of Congress. Until the 1860's and the beginnings of Arlington, Congressional Cemetery was the national burial ground.

When one visits this peaceful spot, the first things to strike one's eye are the long rows of the so-called Latrobe cenotaphs, om-

inous sandstone memorials to those congressmen who died in office from 1807 to 1877. The second architect of the Capitol, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, designed these massive square bases with conical caps. Although several hundred of these memorials were erected, one for each congressman who died in office, only eighty bodies were actually interred under them. In many cases, burial in Congressional Cemetery was only temporary, until seasons changed and the dirt roads leading home became passable once more.

Occasionally, the government would erect a cenotaph to a private citizen. One bears the name of Push-Ma-Ta-Ha, a Choctaw chief who died of diphtheria while in Washington to negotiate a treaty. Carved on his cenotaph are his last words, "When I am gone, let the

big guns boom over me." In accordance with his wish, he was given a full military funeral.

The practice of erecting these curious four-and-one-half-foot-tall monuments to each deceased congressman's memory was halted in 1877, largely because of a speech by Senator George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts, who said that the thought of being buried beneath one of them added a new terror to death.²⁰

Although largely overlooked today, Congressional Cemetery remains the final monument to a fascinating assortment of famous Americans. When I recently visited the cemetery, I found the tomb of Vice President Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Gerry, for whom the "Gerrymander" was named, was stricken while riding in his carriage to preside over the Senate. William Thornton, who designed the Capitol Building, and Samuel A. Otis, the first secretary of the Senate, are buried there. So, too, are Civil War photographer Mathew Brady, Marine Corps bandmaster John Philip Sousa, and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Also in Congressional Cemetery stands a recent cenotaph erected in memory of Hale Boggs, the Democratic majority leader of the House of Representatives who disappeared on a flight that went down somewhere between Anchorage and Juneau, Alaska, in October 1972. Since Boggs' body was never recovered, his widow, Representative Lindy Boggs, believed that a cenotaph in Congressional Cemetery would be a fitting memorial. And, indeed, Hale Boggs seems very much at home among monuments to Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and others whose lives were so thoroughly identified with the history of Congress.²¹

We are all familiar with, and grateful for, the opportunity we are afforded of offering tributes from the floor to our friends in the

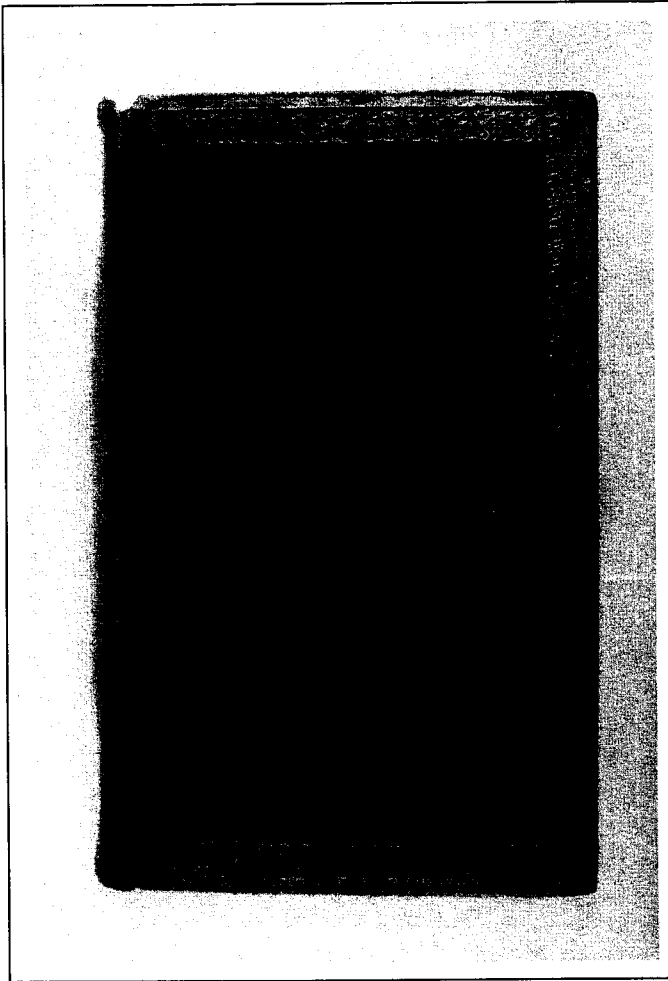
Senate when they are taken from us by death. Many of us have had occasion to rise in the chamber on the days set aside for such tributes and pay homage to some friend. Our parting words are gathered together in a bound volume for family and friends as lasting evidence of our esteem.

Until the mid-1950's, a special memorial service would be held near the beginning of a new session to honor all the members who had passed away since the last such service. These services sometimes took place here in the Senate chamber, and sometimes in the House chamber.

I can remember, when I served in the House, attending memorial services conducted in the House chamber, at which a quartet of representatives would gather in the well of the House and sing the old familiar hymns. I was very impressed with those memorial services and with the harmony of the hymns that were sung by the House quartet.

I believe that the last memorial ceremony (as opposed to a funeral service) held in the Senate was in 1948, and the last joint service, in which Senator Brien McMahon of Connecticut was honored along with several members of the House, was in 1953. These ceremonies were generally conducted by the chaplain and were indeed moving. The walls would reverberate with the notes of an organ and of voices raised in sacred song. The 1953 service, conducted in the House chamber, began with a quartet of representatives, accompanied by a colleague at the piano, singing the excellent verses of "Have Thine Own Way, Lord."

There were two especially poignant moments during these ceremonies. One was the solemn reading of the roll of deceased members. As each name was read, a lovely rose was placed in a vase in the front of the chamber. Finally, the program ended with a serviceman playing the mournful notes of Taps, which echoed through the halls.



From 1827 to 1882, senators took the oath of office on this Senate Bible. *United States Senate Collection*

The same chaplain who is there to conduct our happy and sad services is also always available to counsel and provide information to us, our families, and our staffs. The chaplain often gets calls such as, "Where is the passage in the Bible about the seven fat and seven lean years?" or "What is the name of the Roman Catholic archbishop of . . . ?"

With his counterpart in the House, our chaplain shares responsibility for the beautiful Capitol Prayer Room. I hope that senators have all had the chance to visit this quiet retreat just off the Rotunda. In 1952, Repre-

sentative Brooks Hays of Arkansas and Senator Mike Monroney of Oklahoma conceived the idea of setting aside a room in the building where members could go to sort out their thoughts and pray, away from the turmoil of the floor and their offices. This peaceful room was designed by Architect of the Capitol George Stewart, who skillfully achieved a non-denominational decor. The room was officially opened in the spring of 1955.

I believe the Prayer Room's most impressive feature is the beautiful stained-glass window, a gift from a group of California craftsmen. In the center of the window, against a ruby background, is the kneeling figure of George Washington, representing the people of America at prayer. Above and below the kneeling Washington are the two sides of the Great Seal of the United States. There are no services in this room, nor is it generally open to the public. It is a room for us, for members of Congress, as Speaker Sam Rayburn said at its dedication, "who want to be alone with their God."

The chaplain visits senators when they go to the hospital, represents the Senate in appearances before church groups across the nation, and is host to visiting religious figures who come to the Capitol. On occasion, chaplains of the Senate have led groups of saffron-robed Tibetan monks on tours of the building.

In closing, I would like to repeat something from that 1854 report vindicating the office of the chaplain:

If there be a God who hears prayer—as we believe there is—we submit, that there never was a deliberative body that so eminently needed the fervent prayers of righteous men as the Congress of the United States.

To that I say, Amen!