

**Minnesota House of Representatives
Tape Proceedings House Floor Session
February 23, 2000**

Begin Tape Counter 3186

Representative Michael Paymar:

I'm a little surprised at the Majority Leader for bringing this change of rules to this body today. This is a short legislative session. We have pressing items that we should be debating. And now this is the second time that members of your caucus have brought this to the body to consume more time, more energy, talking about what kind of prayer we should have to start each session. Rep. Leppik, I thought gave a really a beautiful speech last time this was brought up, explaining the reason and the purpose for the language that we currently have in rules, that allows for non-denominational prayer that respects the religious diversity of the House. And how anyone could support the notion of deleting, striking that language out of the rules that respects the religious diversity of the House is beyond me. So not only am I concerned about the time that this is going to take away from the busy work when we should have been doing Minnesota's work, but I'm concerned about the intent behind it. Because it was only last year. . . Mr. Speaker, I can't hear. . . It was only last year, Mr. Speaker and Members that I remember Rep. Lindner getting up before the House and saying to this body that the Christian religion is the majority in this House, that the Christian religion is the majority of this House so why can't we have the kind of prayers we want in this body? Now is that your intent? I know that that is not in your heart to be disrespectful of those members who aren't Christians, Rep. Lindner and others who are going to support this rule change, but it is disrespectful. It is highly disrespectful. You are imposing your own religious beliefs on the rest of this body and the minority members here. Minority religious members here, in my view. I know that's not in your hearts and I know what your intent is, but I have expressed to you before how this makes certain members feel who are not Christians. Now I know that some of you have Christian prayers throughout the week. I get them on my e-mail. You invite people to your fellowships. Fine, do it. Do it whenever you want. Do it before Session starts if you feel like you want to have prayer before the House starts its deliberations. But I would like to be part of that moment where a religious leader gets up before us and has a prayer. But I would like that to be non-denominational and I would like it to be respectful of who I am. And I think this is disrespectful. I would hope the body would reject the Majority Leader's position, we vote down this rule change.

Tape Counter 3372

Representative Arlon Lindner:

Rep. Paymar, I don't know for sure what you're talking about. If you're talking about wasting time, did you sit there and listen to Rep. Kahn waste all that time just a few minutes ago? I think prayer is very important. You know we're told there's one God and one mediator between God and man. The man Christ Jesus. And most of us here are Christians. And we shouldn't be left, not able to pray in the name of our God when we have an opportunity to pray. That's disrespectful of the Majority's rights. Now if you don't want to be here for prayer, as the Speaker has said before, this isn't mandatory, the prayer happens before session begins. And I don't know why you're looking at me all this time, you know while you're talking. I'm very happy this is coming back up and I think all we're doing is putting the order of the day, the order

for prayer and the way we do prayer back like it was for hundreds of years before this session. And if you don't like it, you may have to like it. Or just don't come. I don't come sometimes for some prayers here. There's some groups that pray in here that I stay out of the room. We have that privilege. And you need to exercise it. But don't impose your irreligious left views on me.

Tape Counter 3454

Representative Barb Haake:

Members, I don't know about the rest of you, but I really don't care what God everybody prays to. They're all praying to one God. And as far as I'm concerned, I need all the help I can get. I really appreciate the prayers from everybody's God. Thank you.

Tape Counter 3473

Representative Betty McCollum:

Thank you Mr. Speaker and Members. I'm going to vote against it for a couple of reasons. The paramount one is that the two times this has been discussed on the floor, it was within the way the Rules of the House are adopted. And its more than a simple majority. And I voted against this amendment in the Rule Committee. What we've done here is we've said, 'OK, there's a majority who would like the prayer to be conducted in a certain way. And we can't win when it's a simple majority. So we'll amend the rules going through the rules committee, where simple majority can win.' And the reason why we have a higher standard for adopting the rules as we do in the first weeks of session, is so that the minority is heard. And we lost that in the way that the rules are adopted. And that's why I voted against it in the rules committee. I'm very concerned about the tenor of discussion. I'm a Christian, I'm a Catholic. And I'm not here trying to out-Christian anybody else. And when I want to pray a Catholic Creed, I do it at church. And I enjoy the fellowship of the many denominations in this hall. And I enjoy the fellowship of praying together when everybody feels included. And the comments just don't come. Well, you know, if you just don't come for the prayer, you just don't get to say the Pledge of Allegiance either. Because the doors are closed for that. So Members, I would encourage you not to vote for this amendment. And Rep. Paymar, one of my favorite religious songs is, "They know we are Christians by our Love".

Tape Counter 3570

Representative Matt Entenza:

Mr. Speaker I think the issue today is whether or not we're going to show the respect that the present rule has. And Rep. Lindner, I hope that perhaps you want to rethink the last remark that you made. We have members in this body who come from different religious traditions. And to suggest that someone who comes from the Jewish tradition, a tradition that we should all certainly honor, that somehow is an irreligious one, suggests to me that it is very important to vote against this motion from the rules committee.

Tape Counter 3580

Representative Wes Skoglund:

Mr. Speaker will Rep. Lindner yield to a question? Did I hear you say, 'Don't impose your irreligious views on me?' Is that your quote to Rep. Paymar? Mr. Speaker, apparently I'm not speaking loudly enough. Rep. Lindner, did you say 'Don't impose your irreligious views on me?' to Rep. Paymar?

Tape Counter 3587

Representative Arlon Lindner:

It was something like that.

Tape Counter 3580

Representative Wes Skoglund:

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm embarrassed, quite frankly for what Rep. Lindner said. And as a Christian, who does Bible devotions almost every night with his family, I apologize to you, because most of us don't feel that way, Rep. Paymar. I apologize, I'm embarrassed on behalf of we Christians.