

ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 345 Cedar St. St. Paul, Minn. 55101 FAX TO: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Fax Number: (651) 228-5564 Internet: letters@pioneerpress.com

We welcome your letters. Make them exclusive to us. On e-mail or print letters, provide a full signature, city of residence and (for verification) your address and daytime phone. Preference goes to letters under 225 words. All letters are subject to editing. Direct questions to (651) 228-5545.

# OPINION

## Prayer

### How do you define 'religious tolerance' when it comes to the prayers said at the opening of Minnesota House floor sessions?

arian

## Liberals are trying to intimidate Christians

**ARLON LINDNER**  
GUEST  
COLUMNIST

on, his commen-  
field from the  
in the halls of  
Don't tell a per-  
of the House  
ay in the name

the combustible  
itics. It often  
mmon sense and  
founders of our  
le 16 of the Bill  
n, which states:  
by law to any  
worship." This  
sdom in permit-  
ne House of

at we meet with  
of this situation  
Paymar; and (2)  
and act with the  
ta of which Mr.

Executive director,  
Relations Council of  
m by telephone at  
mndakjerc.org

**M**uch has been written concerning my remarks during the Minnesota House debate on Feb. 23 regarding the prayer before each House session.

A little background might be helpful to set the record straight. For 142 years, a wide variety of Minnesotans from diverse religious traditions provided prayer to open the House session: Lutherans, Muslims, Catholics, Jews, Baptists and those of Native American faiths, just to name a few.

In January 1999, a choir from Totino-Grace High School in Fridley was invited to sing for the opening prayer ceremony. Keeping with the school's religious tradition, the choir sang a beautiful song based on the Apostles' Creed. Afterward, Rep. Michael Paymar, DFL-St. Paul, and a few other legislators expressed their discomfort because the name Jesus Christ was used in the words of the song.

Rather than simply accepting the differences in faith, Reps. Betty McCollum, DFL-North St. Paul, and Peggy Leppik, R-Golden Valley, after shaming some legislators, managed to place new restrictions and qualifications for prayer into the House rules. Rep. Leppik admitted on the House floor that this was done mainly to stop Christians from praying in Jesus's name, which those who prayed seldom did anyway.

This session, I joined several of my House colleague to undo this intolerant change, to restore the rules to what they had been for 142 years — to allow individuals to pray according to their beliefs, whatever their religious tradition may be. Most members, including myself, appreciated the natural diversity that came from this freedom of expression. I am pleased that a bipartisan majority of the House agreed and voted to remove the restrictive language.

During the Feb. 23 debate, I told Rep. Paymar, who opposed this restoration of the House rules, not to impose his "irreligious left" views on me. I meant my remarks on the "irreligious left" to contrast the overused and often-abused term "religious right." But because I was speaking to Rep. Paymar, a legislator of Jewish faith, he and other legislators tried to capitalize politically by arguing that my statement was intolerant, or even anti-Semitic.

This is absurd and absolutely untrue. In my speech on the House floor, I did not make any reference whatsoever to Rep. Paymar being Jewish. I love the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. My Christian faith, after all, has deep and precious roots in Judaism.

This strategy by those on the political left to stop debate through intimidation and victimization must stop. It is destructive to the free and open political process our founders worked so hard to create and our soldiers have fought so hard to protect.

While preaching tolerance and acceptance, the political irreligious left has singled out Christians for discrimination. It has an agenda, and Christians are increasingly the target. During the debate on the House prayer last January, Rep. Phyllis Kahn, DFL-Minneapolis, compared using the name *Jr* in the choir's song to intimidating Jewish people the way Adolf Hitler had done during the Holocaust.

These sorts of inflammatory statements have led some of the more deranged members of society to commit violence towards Christians. Think of Larry Gene Ashbrook shouting, "It's all bulls... what you believe!" as he shot up a Fort Worth church last year. Or the high school student in Kentucky who opened fire on a prayer group in 1997. Or Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris targeting Christians, along with African-American students and athletes, at Columbine High School. Where is this extreme hatred these people evidently have of Christian coming from?

The charges that I defamed people of Jewish faith by calling them "irreligious" are bogus and nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to discredit me in an election year. My conservative reputation, my deeply held beliefs and convictions, combined with the fact that I have led a Wednesday morning fellowship group for four years, has apparently made me a political target.

I earnestly hope that the liberal members of the House will stop being thought and speech police so we can get on with the business of governing the state of Minnesota.

Lindner, of Corcoran, represents District 33A in the Minnesota House. Contact him by telephone at (651) 228-7806 or by e-mail at: rep.arlon.lindner@house.leg

