

Minnesota House of Representatives

HOUSE ETHICS COMMITTEE HEARING **March 20, 2000**

Presentation by the Complainants

Rep. Paymar was respectful to Rep. Lindner

House Floor February 23, 2000 (*emphasis added*)

1

Paymar: “I’m a little surprised at the majority leader bringing this change of rules to this body today. This is short legislative session. We have pressing items we should be debating. 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 whether, what kind of prayer we should have to start each session. Rep. Leppik, I thought, gave really a beautiful speech the last time this was brought up explaining the reason and purpose for the language that we currently have in rules that allows for nondenominational prayer that respects the religious diversity of the House. And how anyone could support the notion of deleting, striking the language out of rules that respects the religious diversity of the House is beyond me. So not only am I concerned about time that this is going to take from the busy work of doing Minnesota’s work, but I’m concerned about the intent behind it, because it was only last year, Mr. Speaker, (*Paymar said he can’t hear, Sviggum said it’s not that loud*). 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 the majority of this house, so why can’t we have the kind of prayers that we want in this body. Now is that your intent? **I know that it’s not in your heart to be disrespectful of those members who are not 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, the minority religious members here. In my view. I know that’s not in your heart and I know what your intent is. I have expressed this to you before how this makes 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 you want prayer before the House starts its deliberations. But I would like to be a part of that moment where a religious leader gets up before us and has a prayer. But I would like that to be nondenominational 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 and we vote down this rule change.”

Rep. Lindner was speaking to Rep. Paymar

From the American Jewish World, March 3, 2000:

2

For his part, Lindner allowed that his remark to Paymar "probably wasn't maybe the best choice of words," but said that Paymar, during his remarks on the House floor, "looked right at me, and started using my name..."

Lindner said that he should not be expected "to just stand still and take the kind of crap, basically, that Rep. Paymar was dishing out and then not respond to it."

Rep. Lindner's remarks covered in the press:

Star Tribune, February 25, 2000

3

Lindner then responded to Paymar: '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. . . . 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. . . . We have that privilege, and you need to exercise it. But don't impose your irreligious left views on me.'

From an op-ed piece by Rep. Lindner

Pioneer Press, March 6, 2000

4

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.

Dictionary definitions:

5

Irreligion... 1. Want of religion : hostility to or disregard of religious principles... 2. False or perverted religion. *obs*

--from *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1961

ir•re•lig•ious \- + \ adj [L *irreligiosus*, ir. in - 'in + *religiosus* religious more at RELIGIOUS] 1 : Lacking recognized religious emotions, doctrines, or practices : UNGODLY 2 : of our constituting irreligion: PROFANE <~speech> 3 *obs* : relating to, believing in, or practicing a false religion...

--from the *Merriam Webster-Dictionary*, 1961

ir•re•lig•ious (ir- i-lij əs) *adj.* Hostile or indifferent to religion; ungodly...

--from the *American Heritage Dictionary*, 1992

Count #1:

6

**Pursuant to House Rule 6.10,
Representative Arlon Lindner violated
accepted norms of House behavior.**

A complaint may be brought about
conduct by a member that . . . violates
accepted norms of House behavior.

Permanent Rules of the House 6.10.

Rules Violation:

7

During the debate on the proposed changes to House Rule 1.01, February 23, 2000, Representative Arlon Lindner violated specific provisions of the Code of Conduct of the Minnesota House of Representatives

- Treat everyone with respect, fairness and courtesy.
- Accept public office as a public trust and endeavor to be worthy of that trust – by respecting the principles of representative democracy, by exemplifying good citizenship and high personal integrity, and by observing the letter and spirit of laws and rules.
- Use the power and facilities of office only to advance the common good.
- Be respectful of the House of Representatives as a fundamental institution of civil government.

Count #2:

Pursuant to House Rule 6.10, Representative Arlon Lindner brought the House into dishonor and disrepute.

A complaint may be brought about conduct by a member that . . . tends to bring the House into dishonor or disrepute.

Permanent Rules of the House 6.10.

Protest and Dissent:

House Journal, February 23, 2000

9

PROTEST AND DISSENT

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 11, of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota the following members of the Minnesota State House of Representatives file a formal dissent and protest as a result of the remarks of Representative Arlon Lindner on February 23, 2000.

On this day Representative Lindner defamed people of the Jewish faith by calling them irreligious and impugning the sincerity of their religious beliefs.

Article I, Section 16, of the Minnesota State Constitution protects the freedom of religion in the State of Minnesota. Representative Lindner's remarks do damage to the tradition of religious tolerance that we enjoy in the State of Minnesota and we must forcefully protest and dissent.

Submitted by:

TOM PUGH
BETTY FOLLIARD
MINDY GREILING
STEVE WENZEL
BILL HILTY
TIM MAHONEY
DALE SWAPINSKI
ROB LEIGHTON
MARY MURPHY
TOM OSTHOFF

MATT ENTENZA
STEVE TRIMBLE
KAREN CLARK
ALICE JOHNSON
WES SKOGLUND
TOM HUNTLEY
GENE PELOWSKI
GARY KUBLY
DAVID TOMASSONI
JOHN DORN

SHARON MARKO
JEAN WAGENIUS
LEN BIERNAT
LOREN SOLBERG
LUANNE KOSKINEN
LOREN JENNINGS
BETTY MCCOLLUM
BOB MILBERT
DOUG PETERSON
ALICE HAUSMAN

5980

JOURNAL OF THE HOUSE

[76TH DAY

LYNDON CARLSON
ANN LENCZEWSKI
IRV ANDERSON
GREGORY GRAY
JOE OPATZ
ANN H. REST
LEE GREENFIELD
JOE MULLERY
RON ERHARDT
JIM RHODES
HARRY MARES
JULIE STORM

PHYLLIS KAHN
ROD SKOE
BERNIE LIEDER
DARLENE LUTHER
MYRON ORFIELD
M. JAROS
MARY MCGUIRE
PEG LARSEN
RON ABRAMS
DAN DORMAN
TONY KIELKUCKI

SATVEER CHAUDHARY
MICHAEL PAYMAR
DAN LARSON
KRIS HASSKAMP
CARLOS MARIANI
ANDY DAWKINS
HENRY KALIS
PEGGY LEPPIK
DAVE BISHOP
BILL KUISLE
JIM CLARK

ADJOURNMENT

Pawlenty moved that when the House adjourns today it adjourn until 3:00 p.m., Thursday, February 24, 2000. The motion prevailed.

Pawlenty moved that the House adjourn. The motion prevailed, and the Speaker declared the House stands adjourned until 3:00 p.m., Thursday, February 24, 2000.

EDWARD A. BURDICK, Chief Clerk, House of Representatives

**Reps. Storm & Kielucki have since withdrawn their names.*

What other legislators think:

10

Rep. Ron Abrams in the Pioneer Press, February 26, 2000:

“I think they were outrageous,” Abrams said. “I think they were offensive to the body, and I believe they represented the views solely of Rep. Lindner.”

Rep. Tom Pugh in the Star Tribune, February 25, 2000:

House Minority Leader Tom Pugh, DFL-South St. Paul, said Lindner’s remarks were “one of the most shocking displays of insensitivity and intolerance that any of us can remember.”

Count #3:

//

Pursuant to House Rule 9.01 the Rules Committee has established a code of conduct for members, officers and employees of the House. Representative Lindner violated Rule 6. 10 by indicating that members of this House should be excluded from participation in the business of the House after the House has been called to order pursuant to Rule 1.0 1. Rule 6. 10 states in part:

A complaint may be brought about conduct by a member that ... violates accepted norms of House behavior.

By suggesting that Jewish members were not welcome during session Representative Lindner violated Rule 6. 10. No member should be made unwelcome during session on the basis of their religious belief.

RICK MORGAN
RABBI ED ROTHMAN
KEITH REITMAN

Rep. Arlon Lindner Opening Comments March 20, 2000

Good Morning, Madam Chair, members and visitors.

We are witnessing a historic day at the beginning of this 21st century here in Minnesota when an elected state official fulfilling his duties and debating issues in committees or on the House floor is allowed to be intimidated by false charges until silenced. Members, I won't be silenced.

I have served as a state representative for eight years and it never entered my mind that I would someday have to appear before this Ethics Committee. In the past, I only knew of members who had Ethics complaints filed against them because of investigations for gross misdemeanor or felony type charges pending outside this body. Here I am, before you, because I exercised my first amendment rights in a debate on the House floor. Actually, I'm charged for what someone thought I said instead of what I actually said.

The seriousness and nature of these charges have brought forth scores of people from my district and elsewhere who have offered their support and vote of confidence for me. This past Saturday, I was unanimously endorsed at our Republican District 33 convention in running for my fifth term. I want to publicly thank all our many friends for their support.

The complaints about me center around my referring to Rep. Michael Paymar's views toward my Christian faith as that of the "irreligious left," a term sometimes used like "religious right" is used, only in reverse. I would like to briefly state the charges and refute them.

Count 1. is that I made derogatory remarks about the Jewish faith.

I was addressing Representative Paymar's views about the Christian faith and did not mention anything about the Jewish faith.

Rep. Paymar said, "I know that that's not in your heart, to be disrespectful of those members that aren't Christians, Representative Lindner, and those 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 this Body..."

This quote by Representative Paymar means that everyone that voted against the rule change was highly disrespectful to him but I am the only one charged today.

Count 2. is that I defamed people of the Jewish faith by calling them irreligious and impugning the sincerity of their religious beliefs.

I was talking to one person, Representative Paymar, and no one else. How anyone could have misconstrued this to mean all Jewish people is beyond me. Again, I was referring to Rep. Paymar's view of my faith, the Christian faith, which I said was that of the irreligious left.

Count 3. is that I suggested that Jewish members are not welcome during session.

This charge is absurd! Majority leader, Tim Pawlenty, said "prayers are before session, that no one is excluded." I agree with his statement, "You can choose to not come and come after the prayer or wait out wherever you like if you want."

Different members do this on a regular basis all the time and no one thinks any different of them.

Madam Chair and Members, I hereby declare that I am innocent of all three charges.

Dictionary definitions:

Exception... 6. Objection, demur, faultfinding; an instance of this, an objection, adverse criticism, complaint...

--from Oxford English Dictionary, 1961

ex•cep•tion \ik'sepshən... 3 a: something offered or offerable as objection or as a ground of objection or taken as objectionable...

--from the Merriam Webster-Dictionary, 1961

ex•cep•tion (ik sep·shə n) *n*...5. **take exception, a.** to make an objection; demur: *They took exception to several points of the contract.* **b.** to take offense: *She took exception to what I said about her brother...*

--from the Random House Dictionary, 1987

ex•cep•tion (ik-sep·shən) *n*...3. an objection or a criticism...4.

--from the American Heritage Dictionary, 1992

EXCHANGE DURING DEBATE
Exchange during Debate on March 16, 2000 on Krinkie
Amendment to Omnibus Crime bill

Rukavina: ... Representative Broecker, we listened to that bunch of BS here a few years back about a statewide systems project. Representative Kahn, how much was it supposed to save.

Skoglund: Representative Rukavina, Representative Skoglund

Skoglund: Mr. Speaker, I rise to a point of order on proper words and debate and I think Representative Rukavina should not use certain language on this floor, even though the comments weren't directed to me I think the decorum of this House should be kept

Skoglund: Representative Rukavina, we will strike those words. Representative Rukavina

Rukavina: Well, at least I didn't use the actual full words, Mr. Speaker. Representative Skoglund

Testimony of Karen Mathias

Thank you Mr. Chair for allowing me to testify on behalf of Representative Lindner.

My name is Karen Mathias. I was raised as a Jew and I wish to speak to in support of Representative Lindner. If I as a Jew were to be sitting in the House Chambers, I would want my Rabbi to be able to address my God using his name whether referring to him as Adonai, Eloheynu, Ha-Shem or some other common Jewish atestation. I would also like to see a Moslem be able to pray in the name of Allah. Likewise, I would want all religious representatives to be able to pray in their god's name, including Christians to be able to pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Representative Lindner has been brought before this Ethics Committee and is accused of Anti-Semitism. To me I do not see the Anti-Semitism within his statement. I checked the transcript from the day in question and I also read the newspaper articles from the day in question. First I see no reference to Representative Paymar's being Jewish, or the state of Israel, or to anything that would bring to recollection anything that is a reference to things Jewish. I see no name-calling, not anything as Jew that I would find offensive. Second, I have been a victim of Anti-Semitism, growing up in Brooklyn Park, I was only one of two Jewish people in Anoka Sr. High, and there were several times where I was called a "dirty Jew" and a few times where I was told, "I killed Christ". Additionally, my Grandfather who is a professional businessperson within the Minneapolis Community and a prominent engineer, and he was not allowed to join a certain golf course in the Minneapolis area. My Grandfather was not allowed to join MENSA because of his Jewish background. My Grandfather was also denied many opportunities for employment because of his Jewishness, it was so difficult that he had to create his own firm. I also saw people in my Synagogue who still bore the numbers on their arms from the camps of the Holocaust.

I bring these things up not for pity, not for victim status, but to illustrate a point all of these are in fact Anti-Semitism. These are truly serious problems that need to be dealt with both now and in the future. What Representative Lindner said was not Anti-Semitic or Anti-Semitism. I am sorry from a Jewish view that Representative Paymar would use this discussion on the floor of the House to accuse a fellow House Member of such a charge in light of the real serious incidences of Anti-Semitism that unfortunately still take place today.

This statement is respectfully submitted to the Ethics Committee by Karen Mathias.

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Toward TRADITION

ה'ת

March 13, 2000

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Mark Weinstein, WA

Rep. Arlon W. Lindner
Minnesota House of Representatives
19508 Country Circle East
Rogers, MN 55374

Dear Rep. Lindner,

Thank you for communicating with Toward Tradition on what has to be a difficult and trying problem for you. Rabbi Lapin is out of town for the next few days, but I will do my best to give you whatever assistance I can.

First, I hope you will clarify and/or confirm the factual situation. Is it really the case that the sole piece of evidence against you is your underlined statement on Page 3 of the transcript you faxed to us (which included your "irreligious left" remark)? If so, it seems to me that your accusers are on very thin ice indeed. That statement was indeed sharp and hard-hitting, but how on Earth does it violate the rules of your House?

Second, I think you did an outstanding job of defending your position in the newspaper op-ed you faxed us. (In fact, when the current unpleasantness is behind us, I hope you will allow me to reprint your article in the Toward Tradition newsletter.) If you hold firm to the points you made in that article, you will not only prevail, but will be making an invaluable contribution to religious freedom for all Americans.

Third, it seems to me absolutely essential that you carefully document, with the appropriate transcripts, the statements of the liberals you mentioned in your article: Rep. Leppik's admission that the previous rules change was meant to neuter Christian prayer, and Rep. Kahn's use (unfortunately so typical) of Hitler's name to intimidate her opposition. In fact, if the rules of your House permit, perhaps it would be appropriate for you to file charges against Rep. Kahn.

Fourth, from the transcript you sent us, it seems that at no point following your allegedly offensive remark did Rep. Paymar—the supposed target of the offense—make any complaint to this effect.

That might be a point worth making in your own defense, as it suggests that what is at issue here is not any affront to another member of your House, but a partisan attack on your political ideas.

Fifth, the second underlined statement of Rep. Paymer on Page 2 goes right to the heart of this dispute: First he says that you are "imposing your religious beliefs on the rest of this body," then he retreats (perhaps without realizing it) and speaks of "how this makes certain Members feel, who are not Christians." Well, which is it? As in the case of sexual harassment laws, we seem to be sliding down a slippery slope, in which some people's subjective feelings start to trump other people's right of free speech.

Sixth, if you would like to be able to quote an explicit statement of Rabbi Lapin's in support of your position, I would be delighted to draft one and to get the rabbi's approval for it. We should discuss exactly what such a statement might contain. I have also enclosed two pages from Toward Tradition's Winter 1999 newsletter. This material includes a letter that I drafted, which was signed by Rabbi Daniel Greer, Dean of the Yeshiva of New Haven, rebuking the New Haven Jewish Council for their attempt to stop the Board of Aldermen from opening their meetings with prayers.

Please call me at any time if I can be of further assistance.

Warmest regards,



Adam Pruzan
Program Director



2 Jews figure in GOP
and Democratic
presidential races

4 A special
editorial message
from the publisher

12 Stuart Pimsler
troupe enhances
local arts scene

DFLers file complaint over colleague's anti-Semitic remark

By MORDECAI SPECKTOR
Assistant Editor

A Minnesota legislator has been formally charged with an ethics violation for making a remark taken to be an anti-Semitic slur on the floor of the state House of Representatives.

During a debate Feb. 23 over the rule governing the kind of prayer used to open House sessions, Rep. Arlon Lindner, R-Corcoran, turned to Rep. Michael Paymar, DFL-St. Paul, who is Jewish, and said, "...don't impose your irreligious left views on me."

Lindner's remark was met by gasps and hissing. A number of legislators then rose on the House floor and condemned his statement.

The representatives were voting on a proposed change to the permanent House rules regarding the chaplain's opening prayer — for the fourth time in two years. The proposal sought to delete phrases requiring a prayer that is "non-denominational" and "respects the religious diversity of the House."

Phrases were inserted in the rules last year following complaints about a youth choir singing a Christian hymn to open the legislative session. The changes to the rules were approved on a largely partisan vote in the Republican-controlled House.

"It certainly shocked me that he would say that...especially, on the floor of the House," Paymar told the AJW last week. "I took it very personally. I didn't say anything...but several of my colleagues blasted Rep. Lindner for making such an inappropriate and offensive statement."

At the end of the House session, 60 lawmakers, both DFL and Republican, signed a formal "dissent and protest" regarding Lindner's remarks. Printed in the official daily Journal of the House, it said, in part: "Representative Lindner defamed people of the Jewish faith by calling them irreligious and impugning the sincerity of their religious beliefs....Representative Lindner's remarks do damage to the tradition of religious tolerance that we enjoy in the State of Minnesota and we must forcefully protest and dissent."

Also, on Feb. 25, four DFL representatives filed an ethics complaint with the House speaker. The complaint will be referred to the bipartisan House Ethics Committee, which is obliged to consider the matter before the end of the legislative session. The committee could recommend disciplinary action, such as a reprimand; any recommendation would go to the full House for disposition.

At a Feb. 24 press conference announcing the intention to file an ethics complaint, Rep. Ann Rest, DFL-New Hope — one of the four Democratic House members bringing the complaint — stated, "Characterizing Rep. Paymar's Jewish faith as 'irreligious' is outrageous. It seems clear that Rep. Lindner does not believe that a person can be pious or principled if they are

not of his faith. There was absolutely no justification for his remarks."

In a Feb. 25 letter to the DFL House caucus, Paymar expressed his desire not to be "involved in the ethics complaint" that his colleagues filed, although he wrote that he appreciated their effort. Paymar stated that he did not intend "to become the lightning rod in this controversy over prayer in the House....I want to make sure that the focus remains on the larger issue and not on me as an individual."

Christian conservatives in the Minnesota House believe that visiting chaplains should be allowed to say whatever type of prayer they desire — frequently, the opening prayer has been said in the name of Jesus Christ.

In an interview with the AJW, Rep. Arlon Lindner — who holds a master of divinity degree from Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis — expressed dismay that the House rule on prayer was changed last year, "because it's been nothing but confusion and a problem for those of us that actually believe that prayer means something."

During the Feb. 23 House debate, both Lindner and House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty suggested that those who object to such prayers could leave the House floor.

"The statements that Jewish members and other members are expected to leave [the House floor during the prayer] shows the tremendous insensitivity to the rights of anyone who isn't of the dominant religion," remarked Rep. Matt Entenza, DFL-St. Paul, who initiated the protest petition and is one of the legislators filing the ethics complaint against Lindner.

"I think it's important to call this remark what it was, which was clearly anti-Semitic, and inflammatory, and derogatory to all Jewish people. And it requires a very strong reaction," Entenza told the AJW.

He pointed out that Lindner's conservative positions are well known to his House colleagues, but that he "crossed the line this time....instead of attacking people on a political basis, he labeled Jewish people 'irreligious.'"

For his part, Lindner allowed that his remark to Paymar "probably wasn't maybe the best choice of words," but said that Paymar, during his remarks on the House floor,



Rep. Arlon Lindner: It's a problem for those of us that actually believe that prayer means something.

"looked right at me, and started using my name..."

Lindner said that he should not be expected "to just stand still and take the kind of crap, basically, that Rep. Paymar was dishing out and then not respond to it."

As to the allegation that his remark was anti-Semitic, Lindner jocularly remarked that Paymar has accused him of "being part of the Christian right, and the religious

right...and I kind of got back by saying, if I'm on the religious right, he's on the irreligious left."

Lindner said that he approached Rep. Jim Rhodes, a Republican legislator from suburban Minneapolis, who is Jewish, following the Feb. 23 incident and explained that his remarks were not "directed at Jews in general, because I love Jewish people, I love Israel. And I have studied Israel's history and the Old Testament, and, you know, the law and the prophets mean a lot to me. And I wouldn't want to do anything that even appeared like I was anti-Jew or something, because I'm not."

In a press statement last week, Steven Hunegs, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), condemned the change in the House rules to allow sectarian prayers, and Lindner's "disparaging comments" to Paymar.

"Simple decency also compels an apology in this matter," said Hunegs. "At the same time, the JCRC hopes to transform these ugly comments into a learning opportunity. State Rep. Lindner and the JCRC will be meeting in the near future to discuss the situation."

RUDY BOSCHWITZ

United States Senate

(1978 - 1991)

Editor
American Jewish World

Dear Editor,

Post-it® Fax Note	7671	Date	3/15	# of pages	2
To	Arlon Lindner	From	Rudy Boschwitz		
Co./Dept.		Co.			
Phone #		Phone #			
Fax #		Fax #			

I returned from a very nice 10 days in Florida to find your front page article about my friend, Representative Arlon Lindner. The article was headlined: "DFLers file complaint over colleague's anti-Semitic remark." Arlon making anti-Semitic remarks?! I was floored. I have often been together with Arlon. I have never sensed even a hint of anti-Semitism. Indeed, he was among the first 2 or 3 State Legislators to endorse my run for the U.S. Senate in 1996.

Nor do I find his remark made to a Jewish legislator – "don't impose your irreligious left views on me" – as being anti-Semitic. I would regard the remark as directed at the other legislator's political not religious views. Is it a good choice of words? Certainly not, but it's a stretch to regard them as anti-Semitic. Those of us who know Arlon, his sincerity, and depth of personal faith can understand his pique about the debate that took place about the nature of the prayer which opens the legislative day at the Minnesota House of Representatives.

There is always an opening prayer at the U.S. Senate. It was either the Senate Chaplain or a visiting minister or Rabbi. I often invited Minnesota Rabbis and Ministers to give the opening prayer. It was quite an honor for them and for us, and then they would have the "privileges of the floor" for the whole day. It was always our habit to meet and greet the visiting chaplain. It is a very nice tradition. I believe they were asked to submit their prayer to the Senate Chaplain in advance and in the vast majority of cases the prayers were universal. Perhaps the Chaplain counseled them. I really don't know. But universality was certainly not always the case.

One Jewish Senator frequently objected when the prayer was not universal or mentioned Jesus. I did not. I felt people could pray in their own way and so would I. Frankly, some opening prayers were lengthy lectures to the Senate, sometimes almost in filibuster duration! I found those harder to bear than a minister praying in the name of his or her God.

There is open season for criticizing the thoughts and motivations of religious conservatives like Arlon. No complaints are ever filed. Nobody seems to object to that. But if a conservative makes the slightest misstep, watch out - the fur sure flies!

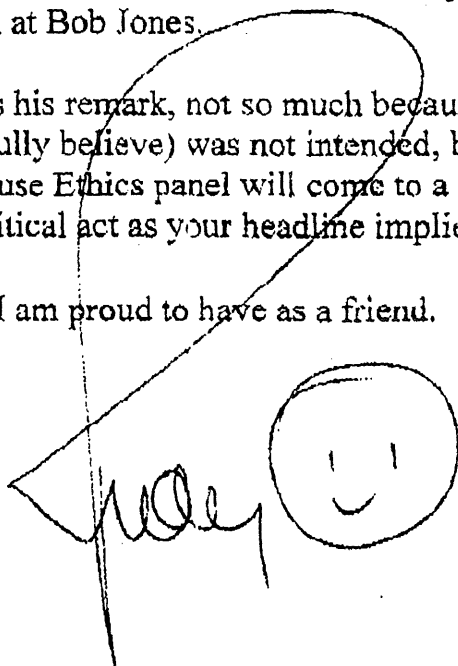
There really is a double standard. When Al Gore and Bill Bradley met privately in Harlem with the Rev. Al Sharpton, the blatantly anti-Semitic New York Minister who was also the chief sponsor of a recent Gore-Bradley debate, little was said. Gore justified his meeting by saying: "He (Sharpton) received something like I think 131,000 votes in the last New York City election." I was particularly disappointed in Bill Bradley who I know so well as having higher standards.

What would have happened if a Republican presidential candidate met privately with David Duke and then justified the meeting by saying Duke received 671,000 votes in a gubernatorial election, as he did. I would certainly lead the hue and cry. We threw Duke out of our Party long ago and the Democrats should do the same to Sharpton who is no less reprehensible.

But let George W. go to Bob Jones University and all hell breaks loose. It is proof of his anti-Catholicism, even though his brother is a Catholic and a parade of other candidates of both parties have preceded him at Bob Jones.

I understand Arlon regrets his remark, not so much because of its supposed anti-Semitic tone which he tells me (and I fully believe) was not intended, but because it offended one of his colleagues. I trust the House Ethics panel will come to a similar conclusion and see this complaint as a simple political act as your headline implied.

Arlon is a good guy who I am proud to have as a friend.

A handwritten signature, possibly "Arlon", is written in cursive. To the right of the signature is a simple hand-drawn smiley face consisting of a circle with two dots for eyes and a curved line for a mouth.

STATEMENT BY KEITH REITMAN

My name is Keith Reitman, a Jewish person and friend of Arlon Lindner generally connected with Jewish thought and Jewish community. Each month I read the Jewish World, the Jewish Forward, the Jerusalem Report and recently the publication Moment Biblical Archaeology Review.

After reading a report in the Jewish World on Arlon Lindner's comments on the House floor titled "DFL'ers File Complaint over Colleague's Anti-Semitic Remark," I inquired into this matter.

My inquiry led me to speak with Mordecai, Spector Reporter, and an editor of Jewish World. I then had opportunities to speak with my friend Arlon Lindner, Steve Hunegs, and Stephen Silberfarb from the Jewish Community Relations Council, and Rep. Michael Paymar, St. Paul. These conversations were a great opportunity for me because I learned more about the sincere religious views of Arlon Lindner. I learned about the calm, thoughtful, friendly, knowledgeable problem analyzing and problem solving skills of the JCRC, and the responsible, amiable, and reasonable outlook of Rep. Paymar.

I felt a lot in common with Rep. Paymar and I told him so. The whole debate about prayer in the House reminded me of my childhood on the south side of Chicago where I attended elementary school at a huge brick Victorian Gothic building named Edger Allen Poe School. I was almost the only Jew there and Christmas time there was difficult for me. But even as a 10 year old, I resisted singing Christmas carols around the Christmas tree. At Christmas assembly, my teacher said "you don't have to sing, just mouth the words." Times sure have changed since then.

In regard to the comment, "don't impose your irreligious left views on me" made by Arlon Lindner as reported in the Jewish World, I ask all assembled to yield to the JCRC opinion written in a letter to Arlon dated March 14, 2000 that his explanation was "reasonable and sincere." Hence, I believe, not bigoted at all.

I wish to review the longer statement made by Arlon by breaking his quote down, line by line and mixing it together in a fictional but plausible dialogue with me. I shall be a freshman legislator who has turned to Arlon for advise and information in private conversation. I shall use his words verbatim from the record and add some words he might say to clarify his verbatim quotes.

Me: Arlon, with the reinstatement of Sectarian, uncensored prayer, I'm hearing some religious leaders invoking Jesus Christ in prayer. Why is that?

Arlon: 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.

Me: I'm from a very diverse district, I've got Asian and African constituents who kill an animal as prayer and sometimes its messy.

Arlon: "If you don't like it, you may have to like it," because we are very diverse community here in Minnesota, and I bet almost all prayer is a sincere reaching out to a higher power.

Me: You mentioned to me how you avoided a religious ceremony over in the House chamber, that you thought might upset you or make you feel uncomfortable. Should I plug my ears and cover my eyes if Buddha, Rama, the Great Spirit or the Holy Ghost is invoked in a prayer at the House chamber.

Arlon: "Or just don't come." "I don't come sometimes for some prayers here." "I enter the chamber to represent my constituents after the prayer has ended." "We have that privilege, and you need to exercise it." So you can avoid being uncomfortable without interfering in diversity.

March 14, 2000
7 Adar II 5760

Honorable Arlon Lindner
Minnesota House of Representatives
417 State Office Building
100 Constitution Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55155
VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Representative Lindner:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on Monday, March 13, 2000. We appreciate the frank discussion and the opportunity to learn your perspective on the House prayer issue.

We hope we successfully communicated to you our views with regard to the statement that you made on the House floor. While we understand that some may interpret your comment to Mr. Paymar regarding his "irreligious left" views as anti-Semitic, your explanation, that it was a response to the label "religious right," is reasonable and sincere.

At the same time, we were offended by the following comment you made during your floor speech:


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.... 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.... We have that privilege, and you need to exercise it.

Rather than calling for prayer that respects the many religious traditions of your colleagues and the constituents you and they represent, this comment does the exact opposite. The message it sends is not one of inclusion, respect and tolerance but of division, disregard and coercion.

We would appreciate an expeditious response that addresses our concerns. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Steve Hunegs
President


Stephen R. Silberfarb
Executive Director

From: Joe Seidel <jseidel@progroupinc.com>
To: "rep.arlon.lindner@house.leg.state.mn.us" <rep.arlon.lindner@house.leg.state.mn.us>
Date: 3/6/00 11:12AM
Subject: Thank you!

3/6/00

Dear Representative Lindner,

I would like to thank you for standing up for your beliefs and articulating your thoughts in such a clear and concise manner. I am of the same opinion that the only groups that can be criticized with impunity are conservatives, Christians of all denominations, the "Religious Right", and even our political leaders. It is quite amazing that if you are liberal you can level charges of intolerance against anyone you disagree with for the simple reason that they do not hold the exact same views. It appears that the only people who are intolerant are the liberals when you disagree with them.

Please keep up the good work and know that there are a lot of Minnesotans praying for you (gaspl!) and your colleagues.

Joseph R. Seidel
Controller
ProGroup, Inc.
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Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55414

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From: <DSiegel836@aol.com>
To: <rep.arlon.lindner@house.leg.state.mn.us>
Date: 3/6/00 12:34PM
Subject: Prayer dispute

Dear Representative Lindner:

I write in support of your actions with respect to the "House prayer" dispute that erupted recently. As a Jew (and coincidentally, a constituent of Rep. Paymar), I agree with you that the "irreligious left" has used demonization and ridicule to marginalize anyone who disagrees with their statist agendas, particularly those of faith.

Although I do not much care how the House regulates its prayers, I understand and share your frustration.

I offer no solution, but hope you stand on principle and not buckle under to those who would label you a "right-wing" crank.

Sincerely,

David Siegel
1704 Bohland Ave
St. Paul

Published: Thursday, March 9, 2000

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Perhaps it's time to end prayer at Legislature

Steven Hunegs and Stephen Silberfarb recently [Monday] stated their opposition to sectarian prayer in the state House of Representatives. They cite a prayer by Iman Matthew Ramadan, invoking the names of David, Solomon, Jesus and Mohammed, as an "inspirational" example of nonsectarian prayer.

Hunegs and Silberfarb fail to recognize Ramadan's prayer is every bit as sectarian as a Christian prayer which would mention only Jesus Christ.

The Muslim faith asserts there is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet. Muslims also recognize other prophets, including David, Solomon and Jesus. It would appear Ramadan's prayer was no more broad than his faith allows. Muslims take exception to any prayer which elevates anyone other than Allah to the position of godhood.

Some Jews (Hunegs and Silberfarb apparently excluded) will take exception to invoking blessing from anyone except Yahweh. Christians will take exception to invoking blessings from anyone outside of the the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Atheists will take exception to any prayer. The list goes on.

Hunegs and Silberfarb must take their argument to its logical end: truly nonsectarian prayer can only be achieved by addressing some nameless deity in so broad a fashion that no faith is excluded and no truth-claim is denied. Such a prayer must be so denuded of meaning it will satisfy no one except those who find comic relief in its very utterance.

Perhaps it is time to eliminate formal prayer from our legislative sessions.

Mike Knox

Spoooner, Wis.

SUNDAY, MARCH 5 • 2000

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Lindner's free speech

I am not a Christian, but neither do I have a chip on my shoulder about people who are. If Rep. Arlon Lindner, R-Corcoran, wants to express his personal religious views on the floor of the Minnesota House, he is constitutionally entitled to do so. To drag him before the House Ethics Committee is improper and a violation of the First Amendment.

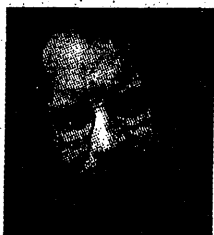
— William McGaughey, Minneapolis.

PIONEER PRESS

MINNESOTA EDITION

MARCH 1, 2000

Let's pray that religious tolerance is extended mutually in all directions



D.J. TICE
EDITORIAL
WRITER

The
punitive
response to
Rep. Arlon
Lindner's
ill-
considered
remarks
betrays, at
least in part,
intolerance
toward
uppity
conserva-
tives

Two years ago, a group of Jewish legislators, all DFLers, publicly chastised St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman for belittling their religion.

Coleman, a Jewish Republican, had employed an Old Testament phrase — "Let my people go!" — while urging state funding for St. Paul's hockey arena. The lawmakers termed this whimsical flourish "highly offensive and insulting."

The problem with exaggerated, politicized complaints about religious or ethnic insensitivity is that they tend to trivialize all such complaints. Here, perhaps, is an illustration.

There appear to be genuine hurt feelings over ill-considered remarks uttered last week in the Minnesota House of Representatives. But the history of liberal lawmakers using religious indignation to batter political opponents makes it hard to be sure.

Last week's war of words concerned the prayers that open sessions of the House. A year ago, the House voted to require an opening prayer that is "non-denominational" and "reflects the religious diversity of the House." Last week, the body reversed that decision.

The House has long invited clergy of many faiths to deliver opening prayers from their various traditions on different days. The trouble started last year, when a choir sang explicitly Christian lyrics that struck some members as excessively sectarian and inconsiderate of non-Christian members.

But other members thought the new requirements would make any authentic prayer difficult.

Unfortunately, last week's debate boiled over. All the attention has been focused

Corcoran. He was responding to Rep. Michael Paymar, DFL-St. Paul, one of the Jewish lawmakers who protested Coleman's biblical reference.

Paymar faulted "Rep. Lindner and others" for "imposing your own religious beliefs on the rest of this body."

Lindner, a fervent Christian conservative, in turn told Paymar, "Don't impose your irreligious left views on me."

The response to Lindner has been fierce, beginning with 64 House members, including a dozen Republicans, formally protesting that Lindner had "defamed people of the Jewish faith," though he made no reference to Jewish people in general. Four DFLers have filed an ethics complaint. Included in heavy press coverage was an editorial in a rival newspaper insisting that Lindner had brought "anti-Semitism . . . a shameful part of Minnesota's past" to "the floor of the Minnesota House."

Now, Lindner's remarks will win no prize for courteous debate. But the punitive response betrays, at least in part, intolerance toward uppity conservatives.

Just how polite is public debate nowadays? Obviously, as Lindner says, the term "irreligious left" is a play on "religious right," a put-down label routinely applied to conservative Christians.

The rival editorial page that condemned Lindner had, only two days earlier, excoriated "the religious right," "the religious fringe" and "evangelist Pat Robertson" for employing what the editorial judged "un-Christian" tactics against Republican presidential candidate John McCain. The editorial also accused "the right-to-life establishment" of opposing McCain solely because he would "shut off

Last fall, the same champions of religious tolerance had laughed off as "a jolly good read" Gov. Jesse Ventura's Playboy interview, in which he called organized religion "a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people."

A computer search shows the term "religious right" has appeared in this newspaper more than 700 times since 1988. The term "irreligious left" had appeared twice before last week.

Last year, liberals widely criticized New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani for undermining free speech by suggesting taxpayer money ought not fund an art exhibit featuring an image of the Virgin Mary adorned with elephant dung. Some years back, a publicly supported photography show including a crucifix submerged in urine received similar support.

In America today, if you say a Christian prayer in public you're showing disrespect to non-Christians. If you display a sacred Christian symbol covered with excrement, you're in line for a public arts grant.

Given the modern casualness about Christians' feelings, maybe it's understandable that Lindner could underestimate the sensitivity of other religious groups. Lindner says he was bothered by Paymar's suggesting the prayer debate was wasting lawmakers' time.

Still, his response, given the context of the debate, was clumsy and harsh. Lindner says he wants to make it clear that he was addressing "one guy," and meant no disparagement of the Jewish faith.

One would like to believe that the House — and, indeed, the whole of American society — can find better ways to honor religious belief in all its forms in a spirit of mutual courtesy and forbearance.

But it's not only Christian conservatives who have work to do to get us there.

Write Tice at dtice@pioneerpress.com or at the Pioneer Press, 345 Cedar St., St. Paul, Minn.

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

Liberals are trying to intimidate Christians

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

**ARLON
LINDNER**
GUEST
COLUMNIST

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 Jesus in the choir's song to intimidating Jewish people in 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 Forth 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) 296-7806 or by e-mail at rep.arlon.lindner@house.leg.state.mn.us.

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