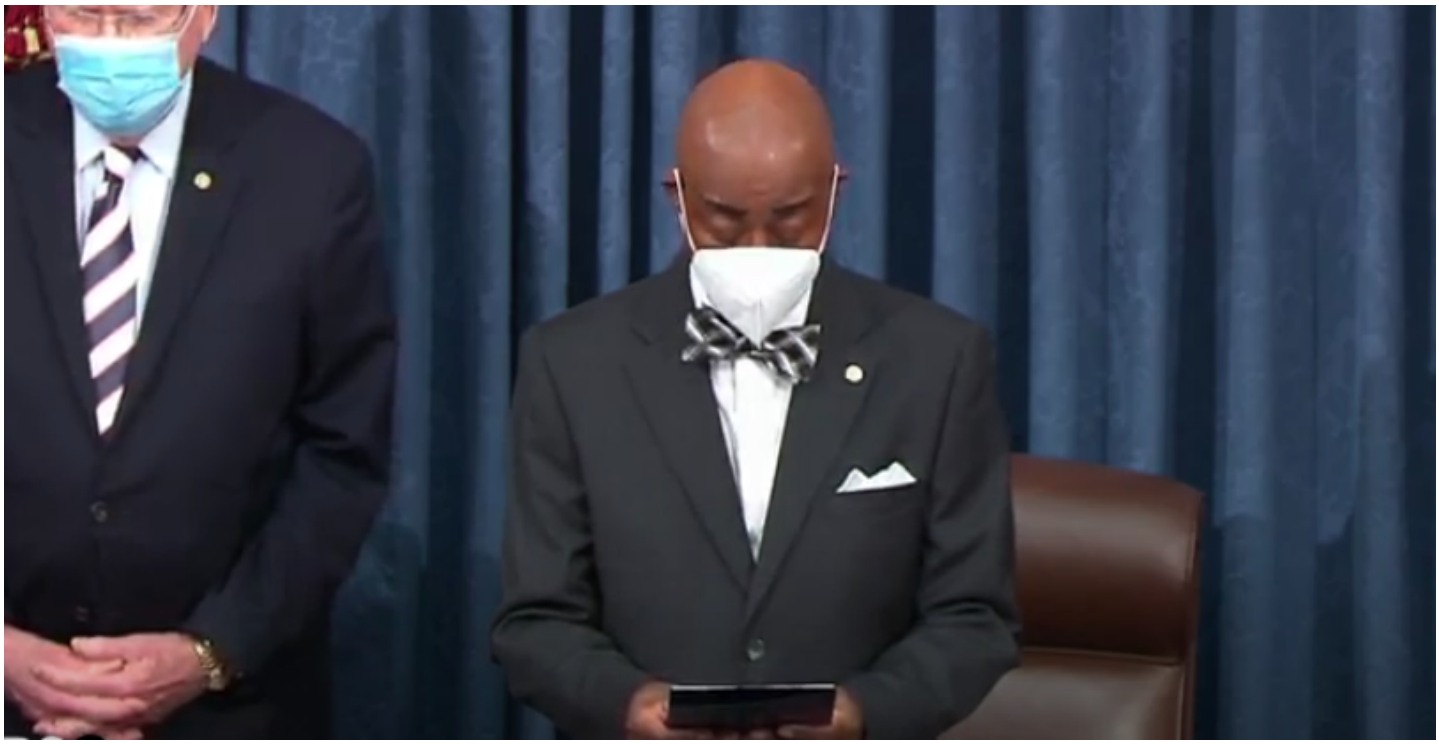
Twitter Thread by Andrew L. Seidel



Andrew L. Seidel
@AndrewLSeidel

I'm getting a lot of questions about the prayer before the #ImpeachmentTrial at the Senate. This #THREAD has your answers.

The prayer is given by Senate Chaplain Barry Black. Yes, the Senate has a chaplain. Yes, your tax dollars pay his salary. And the numbers are shocking:

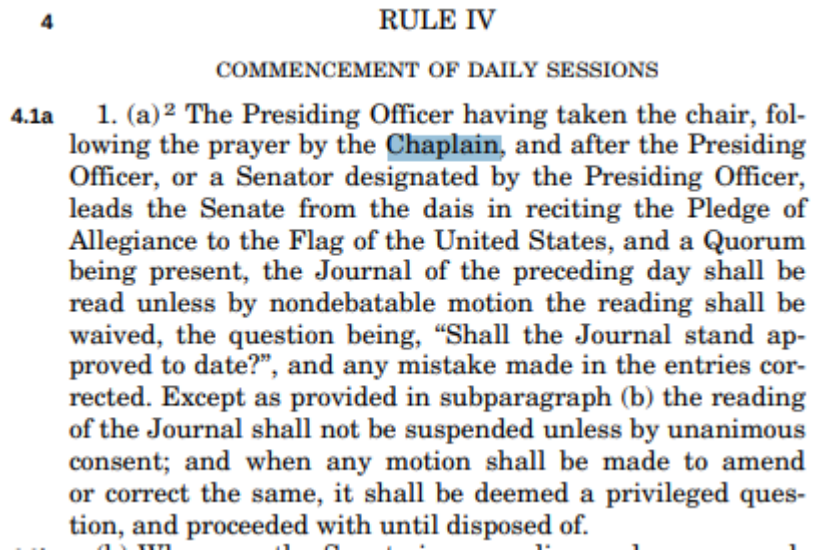


I wrote about this back in 2016. https://t.co/vdc8EGhxPW

From 2000-2015, Congress spent more than $10 million on prayers, the vast majority of which are to the Christian god (more than 96% of prayers in the House were Christian).

The Senate Rules give the chaplain ONE job: to pray.
https://t.co/6dEjnnfy0x

Do chaplains do other things? Sure. But they're paid to pray. The claim that they accommodate the religious freedom of Members of Congress may have made sense when DC was an unpopulated swamp...



4 RULE IV

COMMENCEMENT OF DAILY SESSIONS

4.1a 1. (a)[2] The Presiding Officer having taken the chair, following the prayer by the Chaplain, and after the Presiding Officer, or a Senator designated by the Presiding Officer, leads the Senate from the dais in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States, and a Quorum being present, the Journal of the preceding day shall be read unless by nondebatable motion the reading shall be waived, the question being, "Shall the Journal stand approved to date?", and any mistake made in the entries corrected. Except as provided in subparagraph (b) the reading of the Journal shall not be suspended unless by unanimous consent; and when any motion shall be made to amend or correct the same, it shall be deemed a privileged question, and proceeded with until disposed of.

...but not in an age where houses of worship are on every street corner in DC and when members can zoom with religious counselors of their choice back home or anywhere else. Religious consolation is easy to find.

They chaplains are paid to pray.

And they are paid an awful lot.

The House Chaplain makes $172,500 (2018)
The Senate Chaplain makes $160,787 (2018)

Again, their only job is to say the opening prayer.
https://t.co/a3YrOqPgOZ

Table 1. Members, Officers, and Officials of the House: Selected Salaries

Speaker of the House	$223,500 per annum
Majority and Minority Leaders	$193,400 per annum
All other Representatives (including Delegates and Resident Commissioner From Puerto Rico)	$174,000 per annum
Chief Administrative Officer	$172,500 per annum
Clerk of the House	$172,500 per annum
Sergeant at Arms	$172,500 per annum
Chaplain	$172,500 per annum
Legislative Counsel	$172,500 per annum
Law Revision Counsel	$172,500 per annum
Parliamentarian	$172,500 per annum
Inspector General	$172,500 per annum
Director, Interparliamentary Affairs	$172,500 per annum
General Counsel to the House	$172,500 per annum

Source: For salaries of Members of Congress, P.L. 115-141, section 7; for salaries of officers and officials of the House, Order of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, implementing a pay increase for House employees, effective January 9, 2009, issued January 9, 2009 (contained in 2 U.S.C. §4532). Estimates may also be obtained by examining the quarterly *Statement of Disbursements of the House*.

Now, my numbers are 4 years old, but we were paying $800K each year for prayers back in 2016 because the chaplains each has staffers. Five staffers plus two chaplains for 7 total. I believe that's changed somewhat.

And even with those fat salaries, the official chaplains let “guest chaplains” deliver many of the prayers—about 40% in the House. The House chaplains gave 1,341 invocations from 2000-2015, or about 84 invocations each year. Guest chaplains gave another 857 over that same span.

Can you imagine making $170,000 a year to work for about 3 minutes a day for 84 days?

I can't. But we are all paying for it. That's our tax dollars at work.

And one more thing before we get to the legal questions: nobody in Congress really listens to the prayer.

A few years back, I asked U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan how many members actually sit through the prayers. He said, "no one's in the room...it's pretty much in an empty room." Watch for yourself.
https://t.co/K9unDBXS1l

So we pay $800K each year for, at most, a couple of hundred prayers that nobody really pays attention to.

Sure, the chaplains do other things, but Members of Congress can get those services for free at any house of worship.

Yeah, you should be pissed.

So, here's the big question. How is this constitutional? How is this allowed?

Well, it's unconstitutional. But the Supreme Court said it was OK. Why? Because we've been doing it for a long time.

Yes, seriously.



I wrote about this in The Founding Myth.
https://t.co/V8Guikoz85

TLDR: Chaplains are an old tradition.

Attendees at the First Continental Congress appointed a chaplain to pray in September 1774, when the colonies were still subjects of the British king and had not declared independence. That assembly spent a considerable amount of time discussing reconciliation with Britain, not independence. The battles at Lexington and Concord were still six months away. This is a seminal meeting in American history, but it was fifteen years before our country invented the separation of state and church. There was no United States of America and there was no Constitution, let alone a First Amendment to that Constitution. Stating that the Continental Congress prayed is like stating that part of the British empire prayed: unremarkable. But still, Christian nationalists point to the chaplain's appointment and his prayer as evidence of America's having been founded on Judeo-Christian principles. The US Supreme Court, in an ill-advised decision in 1983, even declared that modern-day prayers at government meetings are not subject to the First Amendment partly because dependent British colonies prayed in 1774.[8] (More on that case on pages 96–97.) As president, John Adams issued calls for prayer and thanksgiving, but thought they might have been responsible for his failed 1800 reelection bid: "Nothing is more dreaded than the National Government meddling with Religion."[9]

Without the benefit of that hindsight, Adams participated in the chaplain's appointment and that prayer in 1774. He wrote Abigail a brief account when the Continental Congress first met:

Mr. Cushing made a Motion, that it should be opened with Prayer. It was opposed by Mr. Jay of N. York and Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina, because we were so divided in religious Sentiments...so that We could not join in the same Act of Worship. Mr. S. Adams arose and said 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. He was a Stranger in Phyladelphia, but had heard that Mr. Duché...deserved that Character, and therefore he moved that Mr. Duché, an episcopal Clergyman, might be desired, to read Prayers to the Congress, tomorrow Morning.[10]

Relying on *any* religious colonialism for a Christian nation claim is a bit beside the point, because the colonies were still colonies; but pointing to the appointment of Jacob Duché as chaplain and the prayer he gave as an example of our Christian founding is fruitless for three more reasons: (1) The prayer was opposed; (2) The prayer was a political gambit, not a statement of religion in a founding principle; and (3) Duché's whole story (see pages 95–96) shows the appointment to have been a mistake and tends to undercut the Christian nationalist claim.

First, John Jay and John Rutledge opposed the prayer motion. Jay and Rutledge would become the first and second chief justices of the Supreme Court. Their opposition should not be ignored nor their reason: that this land is religiously diverse. The more diverse the company, the greater division religion will cause. In such cases, the best policy is to remove religion from the equation.

Second, the important qualifier of Sam Adams's acquiescence to Duché, "who was at the same Time a Friend to his Country," gets left out of the Christian nationalist retelling of this story. This proposal was political, not religious. The

The argument from tradition is awful. If a practice can't stand on its merits, it should fall.

"We've always done it this way" is not a legal argument, it's an admission that you have none. Slavery. Segregation. The subjugation of women. Where would we be if tradition held sway?

The First Amendment says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..." And yet, Congress has established and funded two national preachers.

In that 1983 case, Justices Brennan and Thurgood Marshall said his stupidly unconstitutional:

"In sum, I have no doubt that, if any group of law students were asked to apply the principles of [the First Amendment legal test] to the question of legislative prayer, they would nearly unanimously find the practice to be unconstitutional."

This. Is. Easy.

One last thing...

What terrible calamities would befall Congress without the chaplains? If the court were to declare the positions unconstitutional, as is clearly required by the First Amendment, what would happen?

Nothing. We'd all be just fine.

Nobody attends the prayers anyway, but even if they did, even if prayer was crucial to some Member's daily routine, they could still pray. Nothing would stop them. But we don't need paid chaplains for a Senator to bow her head in prayer.

Let's abolish the chaplaincies.

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