

Mr. Speaker,

Congress has arrived at the time when we and the Nation must look beyond the polls, the media, and beyond the political rhetoric and consider the grave matter of voting on the impeachment of the Nation's president. We stand at a moment of defining action, one that will require each of us to state for the record our commitment to the principles involved in this case.

As the gentleman from Florida, a member of the minority said earlier, our decision is not about Bill Clinton, it is not about personalities, it is not about partisanship. It is not about Republicans or Democrats. Popular opinion and polls cannot dictate our course of action. Duty, honor and obligation must.

On this solemn occasion, I will vote for impeachment. People, politics and polls change. Presidents come and go. Fundamental principles do not. My vote is based on the following principles.

The first, a commitment to the truth. It is essential to a just society. A commitment to the truth is the foundation of our democracy and our freedom.

The second is actions and behaviors matter. Only God can search and sift the soul. Because we cannot read the heart, we must rely on actions and behaviors. Certain actions and behaviors are inconsistent with the office of the President.

Third, forgiveness does not absolve one of responsibility for actions, nor relieve one of the consequences of those actions. Earlier I asked for unanimous consent, and at this time I will submit for the Record an article out of the Wall Street Journal entitled ["Religion Should Not Be Used as a Political Tool,"](#) signed by 85 religious scholars.

In that, it says, "We challenge the widespread assumption that forgiveness relieves a person of further responsibility and serious consequences." I commend this article to all my colleagues and introduce it here.

Further, our children must have positive role models, someone has said now more than ever. There is a standard of conduct below which our leaders must not fall.

In conclusion, I commend to Members the words of George Washington at the eve of the battle of Valley Forge: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest may repair. The event is in the hands of God."

The material referred to is as follows: [From the Wall Street Journal]

Religion Should Not Be A Political Tool

The following statement -- "Declaration Concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis of the Clinton Presidency" -- was signed by 95 religion scholars, including Paul J. Achtemeier (Union Theological Seminary), Karl Paul Donfried (Smith College), Jean Bethke Elshtain (University of Chicago), Stanley M. Hauerwas (Duke University), Robert Peter Imbelli (Boston College), Max L. Stackhouse (Princeton Theological Seminary), and Harry Yeide (George Washington University):

As scholars interested in religion and public life, we protest the manipulation of religion and the debasing of moral language in the discussion about presidential responsibility. We believe that serious misunderstanding of repentance and forgiveness are being exploited for political advantage. The resulting moral confusion is a threat to the integrity of American religion and to the foundations of a civil society. In the conviction that politics and morality cannot be separated, we consider the current crisis to be a critical moment in the life of our country and, therefore, offer the following points for consideration:

MISUSE OF RELIGION

1. Many of us worry about the political misuse of religion and religious symbols even as we endorse the public mission of our churches, synagogues and mosques. In particular we are concerned about the distortion that can come by association with presidential power in events like the Presidential Prayer Breakfast on Sept. 11. We fear the religious community is in danger of being called upon to provide authentication for a politically motivated and incomplete repentance that seeks to avert serious consequences for wrongful acts. While we affirm that pastoral counseling sessions are an appropriate, confidential arena to address these issues, we fear that announcing such meetings to convince the public of the President's sincerity compromises the integrity of religion.

2. We challenge the widespread assumption that forgiveness relieves a person of further responsibility and serious consequences. We are convinced that forgiveness is a relational term that does not function easily within the sphere of constitutional accountability. A wronged party chooses forgiveness instead of revenge and antagonism, but this does not relieve the wrong-doer of consequences. When the President continues to deny any liability for the sins he has confessed, this suggests that the public display of repentance was intended to avoid political disfavor.

CENTRAL TO SURVIVAL

3. We are aware that certain moral qualities are central to the survival of our political system, among which are truthfulness, integrity, respect for the law, respect for the dignity of others, adherence to the constitutional process, and a willingness to avoid the abuse of power. We reject the premise that violations of these ethical standards should be excused so long as a leader remains loyal to a particular political agenda and the nation is blessed by a strong economy. Elected leaders are accountable to the Constitution and to the people who elected them. By his own admission, the president has departed from ethical standards by abusing his presidential office, by his ill use of women, and by his knowing manipulation of truth for indefensible ends. We are particularly troubled about the debasing of the language of public discourse with the aim of avoiding responsibility for one's actions.

4. We are concerned about the impact of this crisis on our children and on our students. Some of them feel betrayed by a president in whom they set their hopes while others are troubled by his misuse of others, by which many in the administration, the political system, and the media were implicated in patterns of deceit and abuse. Neither our students nor we demand perfection. Many of us believe that extreme dangers sometimes require a political leader to engage in morally problematic actions. But we maintain that in general there is a reasonable threshold of behavior beneath which our public leaders should not fall, because the moral character of a people is more important than the tenure of a particular politician or the protection of a particular political agenda. Political and religious history indicate that violations and misunderstandings of such moral issues may have grave consequences. The widespread desire to "get this behind us" does not take seriously enough the nature of transgressions and their social effects.

5. We urge the society as a whole to take account of the ethical commitments necessary for a civil society and to seek the integrity of both public and private morality. While partisan conflicts have usually dominated past debates over public morality, we now confront a much deeper crisis, whether the moral basis of the constitutional system itself will be lost. In the present impeachment discussions, we call for national courage in deliberation that avoids ideological division and engages the process as a constitutional and ethical imperative. We ask Congress to discharge its current duty in a manner mindful of this solemn constitutional and political responsibilities. Only in this way can the process serve the good of the nation as a whole and avoid further sensationalism.

EXTENDED DISCUSSION

6. While some of us think that a presidential resignation or impeachment would be appropriate and others envision less drastic consequences, we are all convinced that extended discussion about constitutional, ethical and religious issues will be required to clarify the situation and to enable a wise decision to be made. We hope to provide an arena in which such discussion can occur in an atmosphere of scholarly integrity and civility without partisan bias.

Speech by Congressman Bachus on the House Floor During Debate on Impeachment