

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Security risk

Helms shouldn't be committee chairman

Republican Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina has proven he is not up to the job of heading the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Last week, Helms questioned President Clinton's ability to serve as the military's commander in chief and suggested the president would need a bodyguard if he ever visited North Carolina.

The statements in themselves are not uncharacteristic of Helms. As a senator, he has made several such challenges and always has been an outspoken Clinton critic.

As a senator, Helms' questioning of the president was not outside his realm of criticism. But as the likely head of the Foreign Relations Committee, the comments jeopardized national security.

Those who deal with international politics recognize that statements such as those Helms made send waves of U.S. instability to the rest of the world.

And Helms' style of irresponsible blasphemy could endanger the already fragile relations and respect the United States has long held in the international scene.

The committee, whose powers include authorizing foreign aid, approving ambassadorial nominations and reviewing treaties, has no place for a chairman whose words run away with him.

Sens. Bob Kerrey, D-Neb., and Tom Daschle, D-S.D., asked expected Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole to deny Helms the chairmanship of the committee.

For the good of the country, the GOP should take charge of Helms and reject his chairmanship. It would be in the United States' best interest to secure a more responsible and less reactionary committee chairperson.

OTHERS' VIEW

Most Americans don't know enough about Asia in general and China in particular. To some people we are, in fact, the laughing-stock of the world, because we live in such an obvious cultural bubble of our own making.

Bubbles, like glass houses, don't wear well. Sooner than we think, our bubble will burst.

By the year 2020, China will become the top world economy, according to Werner Severin, a professor of journalism who has taught in China. Today, in aggregate rankings, China's economy comes in third, behind Japan and the United States. How many Americans think about that?

There's no excuse for ignorance about China. A recent book by Nicholas Kristof, "China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power," covers events in China until Jan. 1, 1994.

Plenty of other information awaits those who are interested. On the Internet, for instance, the newsgroup clari.world.asia.china offers Associated Press and Reuters stories on China.

Americans should read more about Indonesia, China, Russia or any country or region they haven't visited yet.

And then they should visit, if possible, just to be as well-rounded and well-informed as possible.

— The Daily Texan
University of Texas at Austin

EDITORIAL POLICY

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MIKE ROYKO

Americans can pray anywhere

I hopped into a cab, gave the driver an address and then said: "Excuse me, but do you mind if I pray?"

He laughed and said: "Don't worry, I drive careful. You got nothing to worry about."

"No, it's not your driving," I said. "I wanted to pray for a variety of things. Do you have any objection?"

Peering into the rearview mirror, he said: "No, sir. That's your business. Uh, but you're not going to do it real loud, are you?"

"Oh, no. I always pray in a soft mumble. I doubt if you'll be able to hear me."

"Go ahead," he said cheerfully. "I've had fares who did a lot funnier stuff than praying, if you know what I mean."

"I can imagine. By the way, is there anything I can say or ask for on your behalf?"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I just thought as long as I was praying, and this is your cab, I could pass along any requests you might have: wealth, health or a blight upon your enemies. You name it, I'll ask. Of course, I can't guarantee results, but you never know. How about it?"

"Uh, no thanks," he said. "I'm OK, no problems. But thanks anyway."

"Really, it would be no trouble at all."

"No, it's OK. You just go ahead. Don't worry about me. I'm fine."

"Suit yourself," I said. "Now, if you will excuse me, I'll begin."

"Good luck," he said.

When we got to my destination, I paid the fare, got out, waved and said: "Bless you, my boy."

"Yeah," he said, "And you, too."

I relate that incident in the hope that it will comfort Newt Gingrich, the new big heat conservative in Congress.

Gingrich worries about Americans praying, especially schoolchildren. Which is fine. If schoolchildren feel the need to pray, they should.

So should congressmen like Gingrich, and maybe they do, although I haven't detected any heavenly influence in their behavior.

But I don't know why Gingrich and his ilk (he currently has lots of ilks) are so concerned about prayer. My informal survey, beginning with



But I don't know why Gingrich and his ilk ... are so concerned about prayer. My informal survey, beginning with that cab ride, tells me that Americans can pray just about anywhere and any time.

that cab ride, tells me that Americans can pray just about anywhere and any time.

After the cab ride, I dropped in at a tavern, pulled up a stool and said to the bartender: "I hope you have no objections to my praying while I sit here."

He gave me a slightly suspicious look and then said: "You'll still have to pay for your drinks."

"Of course. I simply want to offer up some requests and my gratitude for the bounty of your well-stocked bar, including those pepperoni sticks, of which I will have two."

"Whatever you say. But I hope you aren't going to make a big deal out of it."

"What do you mean by a big deal?"

"I mean, I got a quiet clientele here, so you're not going to jump around or yell or sing or anything like that, are you?"

"Absolutely not. I'll be very restrained. Your other patrons will probably think I'm merely brooding."

"Good. There's nothing worse than someone singing depressing songs or having a crying jag about his dearly departed mother. I cut people off when they start doing that kind of stuff. It's a downer for the other customers and bad for business."

"I understand. You won't even hear one hallelujah from me."

"OK. But I'll turn on the jukebox just in case."

See? Here we have a tavern, a sort of place sometimes thought of as wicked or sinful.

Yet, I had no difficulty using it as a place of worship. Indeed, I could have done so without even telling the bartender what I was doing. Had I rested my head on the bar while praying, he would have thought I was just showing the effects of a stressful day.

It was another example of the potential for spiritual growth that exists in this free country. A potential that Gingrich may not be aware of, because he appears to be so deeply concerned about prayer opportunities.

But just think about it: If I can pray in a tavern, what is to stop a student from praying in school? After all, bartenders are no less demanding than teachers.

Later, I went to a restaurant. The hostess said, "Smoking or non-smoking?"

"Doesn't matter," I said. "But do you have praying and nonpraying sections?"

"Excuse me?"

"Do you have sections where people can say grace or not say grace? That sort of thing?"

"Not that I know of. It's never come up before. But I guess it's all right anywhere, you know?"

The potential appears to be unlimited. If we can pray in public restaurants, I'm sure students can do the same in the school cafeteria. What would an atheistic server withhold a worshiper's meatloaf?

And this morning, when I arrived at work, I asked a lobby security guard, "Do you know if we have a company policy forbidding prayer at one's desk?"

He looked at me for several seconds, shook his head and said: "If we do, nobody told me about it."

"Great," I said. "I'll put in a good word for you, my lad."

He nodded and said, "Uh-huh." He clearly was moved.

So I think Gingrich and his politically flexible new ally, President Clinton, can relax. Our right to pray is secure. They can get back to the business of spending less of our money. We can all pray for that. Anywhere.

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