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These are excerpts form the Pryor hearing. Organizations should be getting members to call Senators in the South, Maine, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania.

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Quotes on Religion

Sen. Schumer's Opening Statement

“ ... And in General Pryor's case his beliefs are so well known, so deeply held, that it is very hard to believe, very hard to believe that they are not going to deeply influence the way he comes about saying, ‘I will follow the law,’ and that would be true of anybody who had very, very deeply held views”

“... There is a degree of subjectivity, especially in close cases and controversies on hot-button issues, and it is hard to believe that the incredibly strong ideology of this nominee will not impact how he rules if confirmed”

“... My guess is that most, certainly many of the President's judicial nominees have been pro-life, but I have voted for almost all of them because I have been persuaded they are committed to upholding the rule of law, and committed to upholding Roe v. Wade in particular. I for one believe that a judge can be pro-life, yet be fair, balanced, and uphold a woman's right to choose, but for a judge to set aside his or her personal views, the commitment to the rule of law must clearly supersede his or her personal agenda. That is something some can pull off, but not everybody can. ...

“But based on the comments Attorney General Pryor has made on this subject, I have got some real concerns that he cannot, because he feels these views so deeply and so passionately.

“When it comes to separation of church and State, we have to be concerned as well. Again, I agree that some cases, in some cases courts have gone too far. I think the Ninth Circuit went off the deep end in the Pledge of Allegiance case. I personally am a deeply religious man. I believe that if we all behaved more in accord with traditional religious teachings, we would have a better, healthier and safer country. **But the comments the Attorney General has made, coming from someone who if confirmed will be sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution and protect the rights of all Americans regardless of their religious beliefs, they are troubling as well**”

Q & A between Sen. Feinstein and Pryor

Sen. Feinstein: One of the greatest ideals of our country is religious freedom and the religious pluralism that it fosters, and in a graduation speech to McGill-Toolen Catholic High School in 1997, I want to quote something you said. And I quote: “The American experiment is not a theocracy and does not establish an official religion, but the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are rooted in a Christian perspective of the nature of government and the nature of man. The challenge of the next millennium will be to preserve the American experiment by restoring its Christian perspective.”

What are others to think of that statement, as to how you would maintain something that is important to this plural society, and that is an **absolute separation of church and State**?

Mr. Pryor: I would invite anyone to look at my record as Attorney General, Senator, and see how I have faithfully applied the law in the area of the First Amendment. **I do believe that we derive our rights from God** and as stated in the Declaration, and that's what I was referring to in that speech.

Q & A between Sen. Durbin and Pryor

Senator Durbin: ... Can you understand the anxiety and fear that many people have when they hear you argue about the fact that this is a Christian Nation and the many positions you have taken relative to the assertion of the Ten Commandments in a public setting and statements that are made. I am Christian myself, but I can understand how people who are not would feel that this is a form of discrimination against them. And I would ask you, how do you reconcile then your admiration for Frank Johnson's courage to stand up against discrimination against people of color and the fact that you seem to have an ambivalence when it comes to the whole question of asserting the rights of those who don't happen to be Christian to practice their religion in this diverse Nation.

Pryor: I have never used the term "Christian Nation." I have said that this Nation as founded on a Christian perspective of the nature of man, that we derive our rights from God and not from government. And part of that perspective is that every individual enjoys human rights without regard to what the majority wants. Every individual enjoys human rights, like religious freedom and freedom of conscience, including the freedom not to worship.

That is what I have said. That's what I believe in. That goes to the core of what I believe in. It is, I believe, the perspective of the American form of government, and I have been faithful in my record as Attorney General in defending the Constitution when it comes to issues like religious freedom.

Durbin: But let me just ask you, you seem to state that--you just noted the historical connection between the Founding Fathers and Christian faith. But you went further than that. **You have said, "The challenge of the next millennium will be to preserve the American experiment by restoring its Christian perspective."**

What I am asking you is: Do you not understand that that type of statement in a diverse society like America raises concerns of those who don't happen to be Christian, **that you are asserting an agenda of your own, a religious belief of your own, inconsistent with separation of church and state**, which we have honored since the beginning of this Republic?

Pryor: No, Senator, I think that would be a misunderstanding if someone came away with that impression. It goes to the core of my being that I have a moral obligation that is informed by my religious faith to uphold my oath of office, to uphold the Constitution of the United States, which protects freedom of religion and freedom of religious expression. My record as Attorney General has been just that.

When the Supreme Court of the United States struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in the Bourne decision, I worked with a broad cross-section, liberals and conservatives, in Alabama to adopt our own religious freedom amendment to the Constitution of Alabama modeled after RFRA.

When the City of Huntsville tried to use its zoning ordinances to curtail what I thought was legitimate activity of a synagogue in Huntsville, I intervened

as a friend of the court on their side because I thought their argument was supported by the religious freedom amendment to the Constitution of Alabama for which I had campaigned.

I think it would just be a misunderstanding to come away with that impression. **My perspective is one that a Christian perspective of the nature of man is that every person enjoys freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, which, of course, is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution.**

Durbin: General, unfortunately, we have a limited amount of time, and I can't follow up because you clearly have opened up a long series of questions related to the Establishment Clause. It is one thing to say that we have the freedom to practice. **It is another thing to say that we condone by government action certain religious belief or, in fact, propose or promulgate that belief.** And I am going to save those for written questions, but let me go to a more specific area in the limited time that I have remaining.

Remarks by Sen. Kennedy

Kennedy: ... I think the very legitimate issue in question with your nomination is whether you have an agenda, that many of the positions which you have taken reflect not just an advocacy but a very deeply held view and a philosophy, which you are entitled to have, but you are also not entitled to get everyone's vote. If we conclude--in any particular vote we have a responsibility not to just be a rubber stamp for the Executive, but to make an independent judgment whether you have the temperament and also the commitment to interpret the law and also to enforce the law.