

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

December 16, 2010 at 6:43am

Sacrilege & Hypocrisy on Capitol Hill

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Distinctly Catholic

Senator Jim DeMint, Tea Party favorite and just re-elected Senator from South Carolina, says it would be "sacrilegious" to keep the Senate in session until Christmas Eve. Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona accused the Democrats of "disrespecting Christmas," by threatening to keep the body in session.

DeMint, of course, had just threatened to force the Senate to listen to a reading of the entire START Treaty, a delaying tactic that other Republicans do intend to use with regard to the omnibus spending bill. So, which is it, Sen. DeMint: It is okay to delay proceedings so you can then complain about the delay interfering with Christmas? And, Sen. Kyl has been delaying a vote on the START Treaty for weeks now, so his concerns about Christmas are equally rich. What is sacrilegious is using a religious holiday as cover for your stalling agenda.

DeMint's and Kyl's Yuletide concerns were not, however, the greatest instance of hypocrisy yesterday on Capitol Hill. That honor falls to Sen. John Cornyn and Sen. John Thune who spent the better part of a press conference explaining why they would not ask to have their earmarks removed from the omnibus spending bill despite having taken the GOP's anti-earmark pledge. They said they intended to vote against the bill, but that misses the point. If the bill passes, they get the earmarks and they get to complain about the bill because they did not vote for it. If they really think earmarks are such a bad thing, just ask for your earmarks to be removed. That can be done. Instead, the senators looked like two walking waffles.

Other GOP senators are in a similar conundrum about earmarks. The truth be told, earmarks are a non-issue or should be except that the Republicans and the Tea Party have made them seem like the real impediment to budgetary responsibility. In fact, they not only account for a sliver of federal spending, they never really add to federal spending: An earmark directs where the money must go, but it does not necessarily add to the transportation budget or the defense budget. An earmark removes discretion from

the executive agencies, something you would think Republicans would be applauding with Obama in the White House. The entire earmark debate is one of the more absurd fun-house-mirror debates of recent years.

My advice to the GOP senators: Have a very Merry Christmas in Washington. Come to St. Matthew's for Midnight Mass, which is actually at 10 p.m. this year. And, if you still don't know what to get for that special someone, give them an earmark!

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