

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

October 21, 2013 at 10:56am

The Senate chaplain and the shutdown

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

Here in the D.C. area, people are taking a deep breath after more than two weeks of government shutdown and coming perilously close to not raising the debt ceiling.

Religious leaders, including Sr. Simone Campbell of Nuns on the Bus fame, made their voices heard on Capitol Hill on Oct. 15 to decry the shutdown and demand a civil way of doing legislation.

But another religious figure, the Rev. Barry C. Black, minced no words as he communicated with God and senators at the same time. Black is the chaplain of the U.S. Senate, and his prayers opening each day's session got rare coverage, even in *The New York Times*.

I interviewed him this week on "Interfaith Voices," and he quoted some of his prayers:

"We acknowledge our transgressions, our shortcomings, our smugness, our selfishness and our pride. ... Deliver us from the hypocrisy of attempting to sound reasonable while being unreasonable."

"Oh God, cover our shame with the robe of your righteousness."

"We acknowledge our transgressions, our shortcomings, our smugness, our selfishness and our pride."

I asked him why he did this: to be provocative? Scolding (as the *Times* would have it)? Why? His answer was simple: Prayer should be relevant to the situation. Most Americans, I daresay, would agree he achieved that goal.

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