

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
1 COLUMBUS PLAZA
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06510-3326

November 8, 2005

Senator Jeff Sessions
335 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sessions:

During the days since President Bush nominated Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court, I have followed news coverage and public comment on his selection carefully. I am concerned about a portion of it, and as the head of the Knights of Columbus, the nation's largest Catholic lay organization, I want to share some of those concerns with you as you consider the way in which you will fulfill your constitutional role of providing advice and consent on the nomination.

Judge Alito's nomination is an event of significance for Catholics, since it has the potential to be the final step in our struggle of more than 200 years to become accepted as full participants in American society. As recently as 1960, when John F. Kennedy (a fourth degree Knight) finally became the first Catholic to be elected president, there were still more than a few who predicted that the pope would effectively move into the White House with him.

Now, in 2005, we are on the verge of having five Catholics – a majority – on the Supreme Court, and nearly everyone correctly regards it as signifying nothing more than that five extremely capable and accomplished attorneys who happen to be Catholic have been chosen to serve on our highest court.

Clearly, however, some anti-Catholic prejudice remains, although it now comes primarily from abortion-rights partisans who oppose the Catholic Church's teaching on abortion and any individual Catholic who embraces that position. Judge Alito is suspected of being such a person, and thus earned the enmity of abortion rights activist Eleanor Smeal just hours after his nomination: ". . . with Alito, the majority of the Court would be Roman Catholics, which would underrepresent other religions, not to mention nonbelievers."

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In September of 1960, John F. Kennedy confronted the anti-Catholic sentiment of his time in a speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. He spoke of the kind of America he believed in, "the kind of America for which our forefathers did when they fled here to escape religious test oaths that denied office to members of less favored churches – when they fought for the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom – and when they fought at . . . the Alamo. For side by side with Bowie and Crockett died Fuentas, and McCafferty, and Bailey, and Badillo, and Carey -- but no one knows whether they were Catholics or not. For there was no religious test there."

We share President Kennedy's belief in that kind of America. The notion that Judge Alito should be considered unfit for membership on the Supreme Court simply because he is a Catholic (or because he is one Catholic too many) is profoundly in conflict with the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. To reject his nomination on these grounds would be to impose a religious test for public office.

On behalf of the 1.2 million U.S. members of the Knights of Columbus, I ask that you disavow any effort to decide Judge Alito's nomination on the basis of his faith, or the degree to which he is presumed to be a faithful Catholic. And I ask that you base your vote on his nomination on his qualifications and abilities as a judge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl A. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Carl A. Anderson
Supreme Knight