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Remarks at Memorial Service for Congressman Henry J. Hyde, Friday, December 7, 2007, St. Charles, Illinois

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Remarks at the Memorial Service for
Congressman Henry J. Hyde
Friday, December 7, 2007, St. Charles, Illinois

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.

Mrs. Hyde, Members of the Hyde Family:

We are here on behalf of a very grateful nation to share this hour of bereavement with you, and to offer you some words of comfort.

I have often felt that the short speeches, subject to an agreement between Democrats and Republicans, the moment of silence followed and the finality of the gavel, for me, at heart fails to capture the enormity of the man, the woman, the individual for whom a life of service is dedicated and acknowledged.

Herman Watts once preached a sermon, where he began: "Every person comes into this world seeking his name. This is the centrality of life. Not the name upon a birth certificate nor the name by which one's parents call you. What is the name by which God knows you? What is your alignment with the universe? What is your purpose for living? How do you 'justify' the air that you breathe, the food that you eat, the space that you occupy?" Watts says that, "A person cannot live at his best and highest unless he has some primary name."

I have been reading the obituaries of my friend, Henry Hyde. Some read "abortion foe." Others, "Clinton impeacher." Still others, "Conservative." The family should gain great comfort in knowing that Henry did not go by these names. Devoted husband, father, friend who loved and believed in America and her processes.

Here is a "Henryism:" "To my colleagues, you and maybe the nation should gain great comfort in knowing that your obituary has already been written as well. Many Americans would rather our stories be told sooner rather than later."

Only we know not the time, place, or the hour. But the thunderous finality of the last gavel is near. The question is: what is your name? How shall we call you? What was your alignment with what was right?

Henry Hyde was not an abortion foe. He was a public servant and a good man who believed in the American process of civil discourse, which might lend itself to civil disagreement. And when his personal

sense of morality came into conflict with that process, he asked the divine to call him by his name.

Henry Hyde's name was not impeacher. He was a public servant, and a good man and a great friend who loved his country and who believed in the American process of civil discourse, which might lead itself to civil disagreement, and with his understanding of the Constitution and his responsibilities to it, came into contact with certain facts. He did what each of us would do—honor the people by keeping the oath. By keeping the faith. That is, he was honoring his calling and his name.

Most of that which I have learned about the non-personal nature of politics, Mrs. Hyde, came from your husband. His friendship, his warmth, his laughter, his stories, even the smell of his cigar will be missed.

My father often says, "We live our lives as if life is certain and death is uncertain, when in reality death is certain and life is uncertain."

Henry knew that one day he would not answer the roll call, that the moment of silence and the gavel were coming. But we should all gain great comfort in knowing that Henry knew his name.

And so I would imagine that Henry, as he stands at the Pearly Gates, gives his own thunderous knock. When it is answered, Saint Peter says, "For what purpose does the gentleman rise?" Henry says, "To seek recognition. To yield back the balance of my time."