

Catholic right holds first prayer breakfast: National Catholic Prayer Breakfast

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When 1,000 “faithful” Catholics packed a Washington hotel ballroom for the first-ever National Catholic Prayer Breakfast on April 28, noticeably absent was the man who could be the first Catholic president in 44 years. Democratic U.S. presidential candidate Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts probably would have found few kindred souls at the Mayflower Hotel, where organizers promised to uphold church teaching against abortion in a tumultuous election year.

“There never was a finer time to be a faithful Catholic,” said Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, a United Nations watchdog group, who helped organize the breakfast.

Although the nonpartisan menu featured bacon, eggs and coffee, the speakers served up red-meat rhetoric in opposing so-called “partial-birth” abortion and confronting “vacuous” morality. At times it seemed the only thing missing was a Republican elephant. Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie attended, while Terry McAuliffe of the Democratic National Committee, also a Catholic, did not.

GOP Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania received a standing ovation, while Ted Kennedy, the other Democratic Catholic senator from Massachusetts, was nowhere to be seen. Ruse said both McAuliffe and Kennedy are “unfaithful Catholics” for their support of abortion rights. While they might be invited, they would “never be given the microphone.” Organizers said they invited all “pro-life Democratic” members of Congress, but of the half-dozen lawmakers who attended, only one, Representative Bart Stupak of Michigan, was a Democrat.

The sold-out breakfast was organized by luminaries of the Catholic right, including Deal Hudson of *Crisis* magazine, Richard John Neuhaus of the journal *First Things*,

papal biographer George Weigel and William Stetson, director of the Catholic Information Center run by the Opus Dei movement. The event did not have an official endorsement from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, though Cardinal Theodore McCarrick sent his blessings in a letter. Catholic leaders, who have been a minority at the annual National Prayer Breakfast organized by evangelicals, bemoaned “attacks on our church, from within and from without,” as expressed by Ruse, vice president for the breakfast. Allegiance to the church’s prohibition on abortion is paramount in determining who is a “faithful Catholic,” he said. -*Religion News Service*