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### The Right Man At the Right Time (A Perspective Digest Report)

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# THE RIGHT MAN AT THE RIGHT TIME

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**Many Government officials may not know many officials of the Adventist Church, but they know the Adventist Church's man about Washington.**

**O**ne hundred years ago, Elder A. T. Jones, our most aggressive and outspoken advocate for separation of church and state, addressed several Senate hearings as an adversary to pending Sunday law legislation. While we know that God directs the affairs of government, He often uses men and women to accomplish His will. By force of personality and powerful argument, Jones stopped a popular movement for a national Sunday law and thereby changed history.

A hundred years later, we have another powerful advocate for religious liberty on Capital Hill. Elder Wintley Phipps does not have the bombast and pugnacity of Jones, but

he has what Elder Jones never did—the friendship and affection of hundreds of Senators, Congressmen, and Congresswomen. While Jones found it necessary to attack and denounce, Phipps works quietly to persuade and convince. It is not just two different personalities, but different eras and political climates. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1, KJV).

Perhaps nothing illustrates this new relationship better than the fact

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*This article is updated and adapted from “The President’s Scope,” by Ralph Martin, in the Columbia Union Visitor, March 15, 1997.*

that Phipps was a finalist in a recent election for chaplain of the Senate. It was from this prestigious and influential post that Peter Marshall became famous for the prayers with which he began each Senate session.

#### A Voice in High Places

At his inauguration, President Clinton requested that Phipps sing "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," for the religious service. As Assistant to the President [of the General Confer-

ence] for Congressional Affairs, Phipps works closely with the White House, Congress, and several government agencies to make the name of our church known as a respected voice on religious liberty and allied interests. Recently Phipps brought five leading Senators to the General Conference for a delightful session of song and fellowship. Phipps' hopes for a "U.S. Dream Academy" to enhance reading skills of the children of prisoners got a big boost



Phipps and Washington, D.C., acquaintance

when Senator Denton Lott promised funding during this session of Congress.

Says Phipps: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have to attack and condemn to be an effective voice for God in high places. Quite the contrary: A quiet, reasoned voice often prevails in politics as well as the church."

### Conscience Rather than Congress

To Adventists distrustful of government, Phipps points out that the Apostle Paul believed governments to be of God and placed on earth for the good of God's children (Rom. 13:1). Though our public leaders are far from perfect—just as church leaders are also—they are God's agents to maintain law and order so that the gospel may prosper in peace. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, Phipps says, predict that churches will take over the government rather than the government taking over the churches.

"Our concern over the rise of the Christian Right has its genesis in this inspired insight," according to Phipps. "Even when we agree with

aspects of their agenda—no abortions, respect for parents and all authority, the right of children to pray in school—we must oppose their politicizing the gospel." Phipps walks the halls of Congress advocating that conscience rather than the Congress enforce religious goodness and right living.

Many Adventists are not aware that Ellen White opposed the extremist views on complete separation of church and state that A. T. Jones advocated, as well as the strident voice with which he spoke. Ellen White reminded him that government is from God, and at times God has used civil rulers to help His church. She used the example of Ezra and Nehemiah in support of her position.

Wintley Phipps is best known for his gift of music, which the Lord has used to make him known in high circles around the world. But public and church officials alike know him for his quiet commitment to Christ, and the gracious moderation with which he meets opposing views. God has a record of putting the right person in the right place at the right time. □

