NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Canada's new Catholic House speaker

Deborah Gyapong Canadian Catholic News | Jun. 8, 2011

OTTAWA, Ontario -- The newly elected speaker of the House of Commons, Andrew Scheer, 32, has never hidden his Catholic faith from public life.

But the Saskatchewan representative's stands on issues have not given him a reputation for divisiveness. Instead, his record helped him make history as the youngest man to be elected to the leadership role that comes with huge responsibilities and accompanying perks.

Scheer was elected June 2 after seven hours of voting on a field of eight candidates. The speaker only votes on issues in the event of a tie.

"I have often said that we are all motivated by the same thing," Scheer told the House after the final ballot. "We may disagree fundamentally on issues and ideas, but we all do sincerely want Canada to be the best country it can be. I have come to appreciate that on a personal level with each and every member."

Campaign Life Coalition has rated him pro-life and pro-family based on his voting record and public statements.

For instance, Scheer, speaking about the bill to change the definition of marriage, told the House it was "abhorrent to me, to other Catholics and to every member of every faith community."

The father of four has represented the Regina-Qu'Appelle Riding since 2004, but he grew up in Ottawa. His father, Jim Scheer, is a permanent deacon at Ottawa's St. Patrick's Basilica and his mother, Mary, is an active member of the parish. His parents and his wife were in the gallery during the vote.

Last spring, Scheer remained cheerful and unfazed when other political leaders tried to make a political issue out of his hosting a luncheon for members of parliament, Senators and Hill staff featuring a talk by Msgr. Frederick Dolan, Opus Dei's vicar for Canada.

One political leader accused the Conservatives of being influenced by the "fundamentalist religious right," and another described Opus Dei as "creepy."

The attacks coincided with the release of Marci McDonald's polemical book "The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada," which asserted that fundamentalist Christians held too much sway in the current government.

Scheer told Canadian Catholic News in an interview in May 2010 that he was disappointed by his colleagues' sentiments. He praised the work people of faith had done for Canada and noted that their engagement in public life had never been problematic before.

"The last time it was a crime to be a Catholic was in 1827 in Nova Scotia when they repealed the penal laws," he said. "It is a shame that some people are trying again to make members of certain faith groups disqualified from public life."

The speaker of the Senate, Noel Kinsella, a Liberal, is also Catholic and a former seminarian at the Irish College in Rome.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-29 10:44*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/canadas-new-catholic-house-speaker