

RELIGIOUS LEADERS GIVE MANCHIN A PRAYERFUL START INTERFAITH SERVICE HELD AT CHARLESTON MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM ON SUNDAY

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Gov. Joe Manchin has the goodwill of West Virginia's religious community as he takes the initial steps of his new administration.

During an interfaith prayer service at Charleston's Municipal Auditorium Sunday afternoon, church and religious leaders from across the state prayed for Manchin.

Manchin, who was joined on stage by his wife, Gayle, and children, told the crowd of about 200 gathered in the auditorium that "no one can ever pray enough, or have enough prayers said for them."

The state's first Catholic governor, Manchin recalled his family, and his grandfather's trek from Italian immigrant to a leader in Marion County's business community.

The Farmington native said his tight-knit family was one in which adults sacrificed to provide their children with a better life.

"It was a family of unconditional, unending love," he said.

He also touched on West Virginia's potential, saying the state was on "the threshold of great things."

Using the various religions that had come together Sunday as an example, Manchin said moving the state forward would take lawmakers putting aside their differences.

Respectful disagreements and willingness to compromise will put the state on better financial footing and create new opportunities, he said.

"This is going to be a better day for West Virginia," he said.

Prayers came from a cross section of the state's religious leaders. The Most Rev. Bernard Schmitt, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the Rev. Dennis Sparks of the West Virginia Council of Churches and Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi of the Islamic Association of West Virginia all offered prayers for Manchin.

Daoudi sang a prayer from the Koran in Arabic and then translated it into English.

Pastor Tim Shuttlesworth of the Calvary Temple read a passage from the Book of Isaiah, but substituted "West Virginia" for "Israel."

Chaplin David Stauffer of the West Virginia Army National Guard said a prayer for the nation and recounted how Manchin was there to greet his fellow soldiers after they returned from 17 months of duty.

Edwin Harper, pastor of Apostolic Life Cathedral, said the Manchin family is one of the "10 most generous families in the state."

Highlighting the ceremony were musical selections by choral groups WomanSong and OPUS. Charleston gospel singer Ethel Caffie-Austin performed rousing renditions of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "How Great Thou Art."

Manchin's son, Joseph Manchin IV, sang an a cappella version of "Ave Maria."

Earlier in the day, a Mass was celebrated in recognition of Manchin's inauguration.

Bishop Schmitt, saying what was to be his last Mass at Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral before retirement, said Manchin needs to run the state with love.

"Serve with the gift of love. Love for the people . . . a great, genuine unselfish love for the people," Schmitt said.

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