

Senator Gillibrand on abortion, civil rights, and being the light of the world

New York U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand visited Iowa this past May with her husband and their 10 year old son to preach and share her faith with the predominantly black congregation of Waterloo's Mount Carmel Baptist Church. According to the *Des Moines Register*, the family sat in a pew near the front of the intimate church in their Sunday attire, clapping along with the choir, with Gillibrand tapping her foot in rhythm with the gospel music.



With her notebook and Bible verses in hand, she was invited by the Rev. Frantz Whitfield to address the congregation of a couple dozen people after meeting him in New York last month. Gillibrand lamented missing Sunday services lately because of her busying presidential campaign. She said she instead listens to her pastor through a podcast.

But she noted it was because of her religious upbringing and growing up Catholic that she felt called to pray and sit down with her family to consider a run for president. “I thought long and hard about what God calls us to do,” Gillibrand said. “It became clear to me that we are called to be the light of the world. Only light can drive out darkness. Only love can drive out hate.”

In an interview the following month with the *Des Moines Register*, Gillibrand suggested that opposition to abortion is akin to racism... and stated that she plans to impose a litmus test on all of her judicial nominees, should she be elected. When asked whether that choice would threaten judicial independence, here’s how Gillibrand replied:

“I think there’s some issues that have such moral clarity that we have as a society decided that the other side is not acceptable. Imagine saying that it’s okay to appoint a judge who’s racist or anti-Semitic or homophobic. Telling – asking someone to appoint someone who takes away basic human rights of any group of people in America, I don’t think that those are political issues anymore.”

The senator next claimed that she respects “the rights of every American to hold their religious beliefs true to themselves,” but went on to suggest that the principle of “separation of church and state” demands that “ultra-radical conservative judges and justices” not “impose their faith on Americans.”

“There is no moral equivalency when you come to racism,” Gillibrand added, “and I do not believe there is a moral equivalency when it comes to changing laws that deny women reproductive freedom.”

Further on in the interview Gillibrand described her passion for what she views as the civil rights issues of our time: “I’ve led on women’s rights. I’ve led on LGBTQ+ equality. I’ve led on civil rights. Like, this is what I do,” she said. “I take on the fights that other Democrats don’t. I take on the hard conversations that other people don’t want to have.”

In August Senator Gillibrand returned to Iowa to speak at the *Register* Political Soapbox at the Iowa State Fair where her most notable quote was taken from the sermon she had preached at Mount Carmel Baptist Church back in May: “We are meant to be the light of the world.”

Although many people in the heartland and churches of America, perhaps a strong majority, may think her views are “wonky” and out of step with theirs, here in New York she has strong support, especially in urban areas and places like Rochester where her views would be considered quite mainstream. In Rochester’s academic community and among a substantial proportion of local Ob-trained physician groups, opinions like hers are treated as if they were established facts, and those who think differently tend to be lumped together and marginalized along with bigots and racists.

Note: As I was preparing this on August 28, Sen. Gillibrand announced that she is dropping out of the Presidential race this year.

Question: Which side of this division does a better job of carrying “the light of the world”?

