



A CurtainUp Review

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Church and State

By [Deirdre Donovan](#)

How could I believe in a God that would let this happen?

Charles Whitmore



In spite of its starchy title, *Church and State* is a refreshing new play about faith, politics, and the power of social media. Witty, funny, and fast-paced, it unapologetically pours on the propaganda and places the moral compass at center stage.

The scenario: It's three days before Election Day, and the incumbent U. S. Republican Senator Charles Whitmore is in a bid for re-election in North Carolina. While the polls put him in a dead heat with his opponent, an indiscrete remark to a blogger on guns and God suddenly puts him on thin political ice. His Christian wife Sara and liberal Jewish campaign manager Alex Klein desperately try to tell him to stay on script for future speeches and "filter" his public comments. In short, they know that his "speaking from the heart" could end his career.

What sparked the idea for the play was the January 2011 shooting of U. S. Representative Gabby Giffords and 18 others in Tucson, Arizona. Although a litany of other mass shootings is mentioned in Williams' script, it was the Tucson incident that launched his drama.

The play begins just after a school shooting in Raleigh, the hometown of Senator Whitmore. The incident traumatized the community, including the Senator himself, who visited the school site immediately after the shooting. Though his TV ads still promoted him as a protector of Americans' Second Amendment Rights, he now has doubts about his stance on guns— and experiences a crisis of faith. "How could I believe in a God that would let this happen?" His question, posed to the blogger pinpoints his sentiments.

Though the shadow of gun violence hangs heavy over *Church and State* the script is peppered with humor, wit, and deep compassion. Williams also creates three-dimensional characters that hold your attention and make you care about them. It's no easy task to create a play that presents a conservative Senator and his "trophy" wife, a female campaign manager whose vinegary personality contrasts sharply with the more sweet-dispositioned Southerners. The cameo appearances by supporting characters Tom, Marshall, Security Guy and News Anchor add dramatic value

Nagle, as Senator Whitmore, inhabits his role like a second skin. He has his Southern accent down pat and portrays his political character with convincing psychological angst. Nadia Bowers, as Sara Whitmore, is the personification of a candidate's wife who must be supportive and strong of her "hubby" in any given situation. Christa Scott-Reed turns in a steely performance as the campaign manager who knows that "winning" is the golden rule of every political contest. Jonathan Louis Dent smoothly insinuates himself into the four supporting roles.

The creative team get the job done without fancy trimmings, but with the appropriate look of a Senatorial campaign. David Goldstein's two sets, in collaboration with Burke Brown's lighting, evoke green rooms at North Carolina State and then the PNC Arena on Election Night. Dianne K. Graebner's costumes are politically correct. Erik T. Lawson's sound design ensures that we get the sense of crowds voicing their "yeahs" and "nays" for Senator Whitmore.

As sensitively directed by Markus Potter, *Church and State* can make you rethink your feelings on God, gun control, and party lines.