

State of New Mexico  
**House of Representatives**  
Santa Fe

**DAVID GALLEGOS**

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**COMMITTEES:**  
Energy, Environment & Natural  
Resources  
Labor & Economic Development

July 11, 2017

Ms. Dorie Sandoval  
Director  
Cibola Senior Citizen Center  
600 W. Santa Fe Ave.  
Grants, NM 87020

Re: Praying before Meals

Dear Ms. Sandoval:

We have learned that recently, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) sent you a letter asking your staff to stop the practice of praying before meals at the Senior Citizen Center. The FFRF argues that since the Center receives public funds, no public prayer is allowed. Their directive is invoking an erroneous interpretation of the Establishment Clause, and we urge you to disregard it.

We are some of the State Senators and Representatives in New Mexico who are part of the New Mexico Legislative Prayer Caucus. We formed this Caucus because we believe in the power of prayer, and we firmly believe that your First Amendment rights of Free Exercise of Religion protects Americans who want to pray privately or publicly. We are writing this letter to state publicly that you are not alone. We support the Center's practice of praying before meals; a practice that is much older than the Republic itself.

A government official asking people to pray with him or her is certainly not new. George Washington issued the first presidential call to prayer on October 3, 1789. He wrote, "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor." Since then, there have been over 130 presidential calls to prayer, and in 1952 President Harry Truman signed a law making the National Day of Prayer an annual event.

Our Nation's President is not, of course, the only public person who asks people to pray or invokes the blessing of God after almost every speech. Are you aware that each session of the U.S. Supreme Court begins with the prayer that "God save the United States and this Honorable Court"? We start each session of the New Mexico Senate and the House of Representatives in the State Capitol (a **public** building) with prayer and, just like Congress, the New Mexico House has a chaplain who is paid with **public** funds. Starting public meetings with prayer in the legislature is a tradition in our country, just like the tradition of praying before meals.

Although we believe that people in America traditionally have a right to pray either privately or together with others in public, we also believe that others have a right NOT to pray, and that they can exercise their right not to pray without fear of punishment in any form. At the beginning of our legislative sessions in New Mexico, there are some Senators and Representatives who are purposely absent when the prayer is said. There are others who are present, but do not bow their heads and participate in the prayer. Neither those absent from the opening prayer nor those not participating in the prayer are punished in any way. Similarly, those who do not pray before meals should not be treated any differently than those who actually do pray. This is simply consistent with the religious liberty we enjoy in our country.

In conclusion, we applaud you for continuing the time honored tradition of saying grace before meals. May God continue to bless you and the residents of the Cibola Senior Citizen Center. Please continue to PRAY!

If you have questions or need legal assistance, please don't hesitate to contact Rep. Gallegos at 575-390-7570.

Sincerely,



Representative David Gallegos  
Co-Chair  
New Mexico Legislative Prayer Caucus

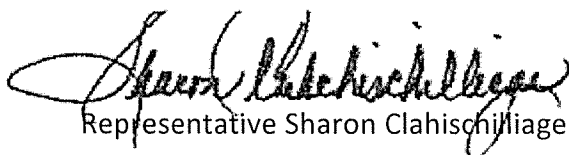
New Mexico Legislative Prayer Caucus Members



Representative David Adkins



Representative Cathrynn Brown




Representative Sharon Clahischillige



Representative Rebecca Dow

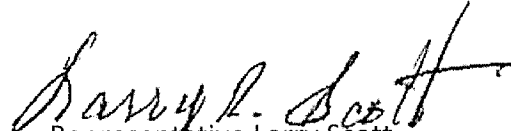
  
Representative Kelly Fajardo

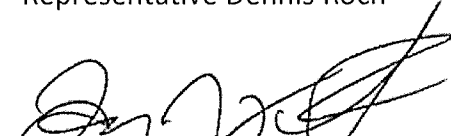
  
Representative Yvette Herrell


  
Representative Rod Montoya

  
Representative Greg Nibert

  
Representative Dennis Roch


  
Representative Larry Scott


  
Representative James Strickler

  
Representative Candie Sweetser

  
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