



# CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

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July 3, 2017

The Hon. Abigail Whelan  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
439 State Office Building  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Promotion of Religion on House Floor

Dear Representative Whelan:

I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation. The Foundation serves nearly 100 members of Congress who are part of the Congressional Prayer Caucus (the names of those members of Congress who serve on the Congressional Prayer Advisory Team are listed on the left). In addition, the Foundation serves Legislative Prayer Caucuses in 31 states, which have over 700 state senators and state representatives in these Legislative Prayer Caucuses. We believe in the power of prayer, and we believe that Americans in all walks of life (including public officials) have the freedom to express their belief in God, and to give glory to God at any time. This freedom is at the core of the First Amendment, since it involves free speech and the free exercise of religion.

It has come to our attention that about two weeks ago, the co-presidents of the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF") sent you a letter complaining of certain statements you made on the Minnesota House floor during a May 23 debate. In that statement, out of exasperation from legislative gamesmanship, you forgave your legislative opponents and said that joy and happiness does not come from legislative success, but from Jesus Christ who loves Republicans and Democrats [and we will add FFRF employees]. You then invited others who may be interested in this eternal joy to call or email you, and then finished by stating that Jesus "is the hope of this state and of this country."

Thank you for the courage of stating this eternal truth that we and, according to FFRF's math on page 2 of its letter, about 80% of your electorate share. Thank you for not showing the hostility to religion that is so evident in FFRF's letter. Thank you for not limiting the most important thing in our respective lives to a closet or a church. We stand with you. Rest assured that you are not alone.

We sent a copy of FFRF's letter to our Special Counsel, Dr. Jim Davids, who teaches constitutional law at Regent University. Dr. Davids has an interest in

the First Amendment, and has written law review articles on the First Amendment in the early days of our Republic. Jim told us that he smiled when he read the letter and remarked that the authors of the letter do not have much appreciation of constitutional history. This history shows floor debates and OFFICIAL acts by both Congress and the President in which they invoke orthodox Christianity. On the FLOOR of the Constitutional Convention itself Dr. Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most secular of all the delegates attending the Convention, reference the Bible three times when he stated:

“I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that **God** governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that "except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel. . . I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.”

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/benfranklin.htm>

The presiding officer at that Convention, Mr. Washington, had of course additional public duties after the Convention ended, and the First Congress, which drafted the First Amendment, officially asked President Washington to proclaim a day of Thanksgiving so all Americans could honor God. Acting officially as the President, Mr. Washington issued a presidential proclamation asking all Americans to devote themselves “to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation.” Mr. Washington did not, however, stop at just asking Americans to give thanks to God. He also asked all Americans to “beseech [the great Lord and Ruler of Nations] to pardon our national and other transgressions . . .”

John Adams, Mr. Washington’s successor, in *another official* presidential proclamation, returned to the subject of national sins and invoked the names of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity when he officially asked that “all religious congregations do, with the deepest humility, acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation, beseeching Him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offenses, and to incline us by His Holy Spirit to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor and heavenly benediction ...”

The official proclamations by our first two presidents, however, were not as religious as the *official* March 30, 1863 proclamation by the 16<sup>th</sup> President, Mr. Lincoln. During the depths

of the greatest crisis our nation experienced, Mr. Lincoln issued a presidential proclamation imploring the American citizens to confess their sins and seek God's mercy, since only those nations that acknowledge God as Lord are blessed. Mrc. Lincoln's proclamation in part states:

[I]t is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. . . .

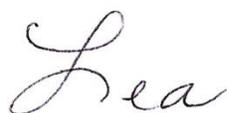
We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

"It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

[Presidential Proclamations for Thanksgiving and Prayer can be found at <http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/thanksgiving-day-proclamations-1789-present>]

Representative Whelan, thank you again for your courage to speak on the floor about the joy achieved through Jesus. You joined the official acts of Presidents Washington, Adams and Lincoln, and Dr. Franklin in speaking publicly of religious matters in your official capacity. That's pretty good company to keep! The cases cited by FFRF dealt with instances in which governmental power was being used to promote religion. Your brief statement did not use whatever governmental power you possess – the government did not punish anyone who failed to call you, and did not reward anyone who did call you. The only reward promised by you was the eternal reward of joy for anyone who voluntarily – with no government force – called on the name of Jesus. Thanks for your continuing service.

For Faith and Freedom,



Lea Carawan  
Executive Director