



# CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

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July 19, 2017

The Honorable Chuck Bennett  
Mayor  
City of Salem  
555 Liberty St., SE RM 220  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Mayor Bennett:

I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation. The Foundation serves the 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 33 states, which has over 750 state senators and state representatives in these Legislative Prayer Caucuses. These leaders are working together to preserve the integrity of our Founding Principles and protect First Amendment rights for all.

It has come to our attention in this regard that FFRF recently sent you a letter about a display of a cross on Keubler Boulevard. We would like to affirm that the Constitution does not require that all references to religion and symbolism with religious roots be removed from public buildings and grounds. This would mean that our national motto, "In God We Trust," could not be displayed and that symbols like doves and olive branches would have to be scrubbed from public places and state seals.

Many symbols that have religious significance have also taken on a broader symbolism in the public at large, including the cross. The Romans used the cross as a form of punishment both before and after Jesus' crucifixion, and therefore the cross has come to symbolize suffering. No one visiting Arlington Cemetery or the grounds at Normandy and walking among the crosses would reasonably believe that our government was advocating the Christian religion. Rather, the reasonable observer is awestruck by the suffering and sacrifices of so many soldiers for their country.

In the 2010 case of *Salazar v. Buono*, which involved a Latin cross in the Mojave Desert that a person demanded that the government take down, three members of the Supreme Court wrote words that are fully applicable here (559 U.S. 700, 718-19):



*The goal of avoiding governmental endorsement does not require eradication of all religious symbols in the public realm. A cross by the side of a public highway marking, for instance, the place where a state trooper perished need not be taken as a statement of governmental support for sectarian beliefs. The Constitution does not oblige government to avoid any public acknowledgment of religion's role in society. . . .*

*[The] Latin cross [in this case] is not merely a reaffirmation of Christian beliefs. It is a symbol often used to honor and respect those whose heroic acts, noble contributions, and patient striving help secure an honored place in history for this Nation and its people. Here, one Latin cross in the desert evokes far more than religion. It evokes thousands of small crosses in foreign fields marking the graves of Americans who fell in battles, battles whose tragedies are compounded if the fallen are forgotten.*

Thank you, Mayor Bennett, for not caving to the intimidation tactics of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with you in this effort.

Sincerely,

Lea Carawan  
Executive Director  
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation