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July 11, 2017

The Honorable Ben Baker
Mayor
203 E. Main Street
Neosho, MO 64850

Dear Mayor Baker:

We are state legislators in Missouri who are part of the Missouri Legislative Prayer Caucus. We formed this Caucus because we believe in the historic and prevailing significance of prayer in civil society and righteous governing. We firmly believe that the First Amendment's "Free Exercise" of Religion protects Americans who want to pray, worship or honor God privately or publicly. We are writing this letter to state publicly that we wholeheartedly support the City's effort to keep the cross in Big Spring Park.

The Constitution does not require that all references to religion and symbolism with religious roots must 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, for you and your city not caving to the unfounded threats of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with you in this effort.

Sincerely,


Senator Ed Emery
District 31


Senator Caleb Rowden
District 19


Senator Dan Brown
District 16


Senator Wayne Wallingford
District 27


Senator Mike Cunningham
District 33


Senator Paul Wieland
District 22


Senator Will Kraus
District 8


Senator Gary Romine
District 3