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August 8, 2017

Commissioner Christopher Alcantara
City of Deltona
2345 Providence Blvd.
Deltona, FL 32725

RE: Biblical Wisdom Provided at Commission Meetings

Dear Commissioner Alcantara:

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 750 state senators and state representatives as members. These leaders are working together to preserve the integrity of our Founding Principles and to protect First Amendment rights for all.

We recently learned that, during the comments portion of Commission meetings, you shared Biblical wisdom with those attending the meeting. We further understand that someone attending a meeting (a Mr. MacDonald) complained of this practice to the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which recently sent you a letter claiming that your practice violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, and that you must, therefore, stop this practice. We encourage you to be strong, to ignore this request, and to use this opportunity to tell the good citizens of Deltona about our country's rich religious heritage.

Contrary to the letter from Americans United, the Supreme Court never officially adopted the Endorsement Test (some Justices thought this Test useful, but the Court never formally adopted it). More importantly, how can your action as a sole Commissioner be considered "governmental action"? We assume that you are not the only Commissioner, and that your action individually has not resulted in a governmental policy adopted by a majority of

Commissioners and the Mayor that favors religion. You are not, by yourself, the government of Deltona. Finally, like every other American, you enjoy the right to free speech, and we urge you to keep exercising that right.

This belief that the Bible's wisdom can lead all of us to better relations with our family and neighbors is not only your and our opinion, it is also the opinion of our nation's Founders. Our second President, John Adams, wrote the following to Dr. Benjamin Rush (also a signer of the Declaration of Independence) on February 2, 1807: "The Bible contains the most profound philosophy, the most perfect morality, and the most refined policy, that ever was conceived upon earth. It is the most republican book in the world, and therefore I will still revere it. ... [W]ithout national morality a republican government cannot be maintained." Patrick Henry described the Bible as "a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed," and John Dickinson, who served as governor of both Pennsylvania and Delaware and was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention stated that the Bible "has done more good than all the books in the world; would do much more, if duly regarded; and might lead the objectors against it to happiness, if they would value it as they should." Dr. Benjamin Rush wrote "that there is no book of its size in the whole world, that contains so much useful knowledge for the government of states, or the direction of the affairs of individuals as the Bible."

For many Founders, the Bible was much more than merely a book of useful knowledge and wisdom, it was also the "Word of God," providing divine guidance in matters of faith and practice. John Jay, the president of the Continental Congress, a co-author of *The Federalist Papers*, and the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, wrote that "the Bible is the best of all Books, for it is the word of God, and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it, and to regulate your life by its precepts."

John Jay's and others' veneration for the Bible was not shared universally by all the Founders. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin appeared to doubt the divine revelation of the Bible, yet Jefferson called Jesus' moral teachings to be "the most benevolent and sublime probably that has been ever taught," and Franklin thought that Jesus' system of morals was "the best the world ever saw or is likely to see."¹

Commissioner Alcantara, you obviously are in good company in your belief that the Bible contains great wisdom. Although we would never claim the same level of wisdom or stature of the Founders, we too believe that the wisdom of the Bible is just as relevant today

¹ All Founder references can be found in Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (Oxford Scholarship Online 2017).

for America as it was during the Founding Era. Please remain steadfast in your practice. You are providing excellent words of wisdom to the good citizens of Deltona.

Sincerely,

Lea Carawan
Executive Director
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation

P.S. According to the newspaper article we read, you choose to share words of wisdom during your Commissioner comments, and you get your wisdom from the Bible. Frankly, we can think of no source better than the Bible for wisdom, particularly in books like Proverbs (Prov. 3:13: “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding” or Prov. 3:7: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil”) or the Gospels. Jesus gave us wisdom by declaring that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, and we should treat others like we want to be treated. Can anyone (including Mr. MacDonald) dispute the wisdom of loving others as much as we love ourselves, or treating others with the love and respect that we also want? Wouldn’t the citizens of the City of Deltona, the State of Florida, and all of us here in the U.S. be better off if we took to heart this wisdom?