



CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

CONGRESSIONAL ADVISORY MEMBERS

Congressman Randy Forbes
Senator James Lankford
Congressman Mark Walker
Senator John Boozman
Congressman Robert Aderholt
Congressman Brian Babin
Congresswoman Marsha
Blackburn
Congressman John Carter
Congressman Mike Conaway
Congressman Kevin Cramer
Congressman Rick Crawford
Congressman Jeff Fortenberry
Congressman Trent Franks
Congressman Gregg Harper
Congressman Vicky Hartzler
Congressman Jody Hice
Congressman Richard Hudson
Congressman Bill Huizenga
Congressman Randy Hultgren
Congressman Doug Lamborn
Congressman Steve Pearce
Congressman Robert Pittenger
Congressman Paul Ryan
Congressman Chris Smith
Congressman Glenn Thompson
Congressman Tim Walberg
Congressman Joe Wilson
Congressman Robert Wittman

September 7, 2017

Mr. Terry Davidson
Superintendent
Comanche Public Schools
1030 Ash Avenue
Comanche, OK 73529

Dear Superintendent Davidson:

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 from news reports that an out-of-state organization, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), threatened Comanche Public Schools with a lawsuit, primarily due to the fact that the Comanche Elementary School displayed a Bible verse that read, "Welcome, The Lord bless you and keep you. Num. 6:24." The FFRF claimed that the Scripture violated the First Amendment because it amounts, in their view, to an endorsement of the Christian religion. The organization, unfortunately, failed to understand that such references, as well as other religious symbols that grace government buildings and monuments, are simply an acknowledgement of religion's rich influence on the development of this nation and its institutions.

This Judeo-Christian historical influence is well-documented in American history, as evidenced by the fact that *Laus Deo*, meaning Praise be to God, is engraved upon the aluminum capstone of The Washington Monument, and that inside the monument, there are a number of memorial stones with scriptural engravings

from the Old and New Testaments. Similarly, the walls of the Library of Congress have inscribed upon them Psalm 19:1 ("The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showest His handiwork"); John 1:5 ("The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not"); and Micah 6:8 ("What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with thy God?").

As you know, there is nothing within our Constitution or the laws of the United States or the decisions of the United States Supreme Court that requires all references to religion and its symbolism to be removed from public buildings and grounds. Our nation and its institutions are replete with such references and symbols, particularly Christian in nature, and some of these same symbols (particularly the cross) have broader meaning in the public at large.

America's religious heritage is literally etched into our collective memory as a nation, from the federal level to our counties, cities, and towns. Though atheists may desire to remove every cross from every military cemetery and every religious reference upon our monuments and buildings, such hostility to religion is contrary to our nation's Founders, our Constitution, and the will of our people. As the U.S. Supreme Court stated well in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, 314 (1952): "[W]e find no constitutional requirement which makes it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and to throw its weight against efforts to widen the effective scope of religious influence."

In 2005, Chief Justice Rehnquist, writing for the Court in the case of *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, wrote that the proper analysis to apply to the use of Scripture on monuments/buildings is the nature of the monument/building and our Nation's history. The Chief Justice wrote the following regarding the portion of Scriptures called the Ten Commandments:

Such acknowledgments of the role played by the Ten Commandments in our Nation's heritage are common throughout America. We need only look within our own Courtroom. Since 1935, Moses has stood, holding two tablets that reveal portions of the Ten Commandments written in Hebrew, among other lawgivers in the south frieze. Representations of the Ten Commandments adorn the metal gates lining the north and south sides of the Courtroom as well as the doors leading into the Courtroom. Moses also sits on the exterior east facade of the building holding the Ten Commandments tablets.

Similar acknowledgments can be seen throughout a visitor's tour of our Nation's Capital. For example, a large statue of Moses holding the Ten Commandments, alongside a statue of the Apostle Paul, has overlooked the rotunda of the Library

of Congress' Jefferson Building since 1897. And the Jefferson Building's Great Reading Room contains a sculpture of a woman beside the Ten Commandments with a quote above her from the Old Testament (Micah 6:8). A medallion with two tablets depicting the Ten Commandments decorates the floor of the National Archives. Inside the Department of Justice, a statue entitled "The Spirit of Law" has two tablets representing the Ten Commandments lying at its feet. In front of the Ronald Reagan Building is another sculpture that includes a depiction of the Ten Commandments. So too a 24-foot-tall sculpture, depicting, among other things, the Ten Commandments and a cross, stands outside the federal courthouse that houses both the Court of Appeals and the District Court for the District of Columbia. Moses is also prominently featured in the Chamber of the United States House of Representatives. . . .

These displays and recognitions of the Ten Commandments bespeak the rich American tradition of religious acknowledgments. Of course, the Ten Commandments are religious - they were so viewed at their inception and so remain. The monument, therefore, has religious significance. According to Judeo-Christian belief, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses by God on Mt. Sinai. But Moses was a lawgiver as well as a religious leader. And the Ten Commandments have an undeniable historical meaning, as the foregoing examples demonstrate. Simply having religious content or promoting a message consistent with a religious doctrine does not run afoul of the Establishment Clause. 545 U.S. at 688-89.

We believe that the Scripture is much less "religious" than the Ten Commandments cited approvingly by the Chief Justice. We encourage you to reconsider, and certainly would support the District's reinstating the Scripture.

Furthermore, in November 2011, Congress passed House Resolution 13 by a landslide 396/9 vote, reaffirming 'In God We Trust' as America's National Motto and encouraging its public display in schools and government buildings. Numerous states, through the legislative process, have also mandated the National Motto be displayed in schools. If Comanche Public Schools has not already done so, we would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to ensure our National Motto is prominently displayed in all classrooms.

Jim Davids is Special Counsel for CPCF and Steve Fitschen is Senior Legal Advisor for CPCF in his capacity as President of the National Legal Foundation. Together, our legal team has decades of experience litigating in state and federal courts. They have won important related victories at the Supreme Court of the United States, various federal courts of appeals, and state supreme

courts and courts of appeals. If you believe you need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Steve at (757) 463-6133 or via email at nlf@nlf.net.

Sincerely,



Lea Carawan
Executive Director
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation