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March 28, 2018

The Honorable Richard H. Finan
Mayor, Village of Evendale
10500 Reading Road
Evendale, OH 45241

Re: Veterans, Police and Fire Memorial Plaques

Dear Mayor Finan:

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 over 30 states, including Ohio, which have nearly 1,000 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 the Freedom from Religion Foundation ("FFRF") sent you a letter alleging that a rebuilt memorial honoring the Village's military veterans, firemen and policemen has a separate gray-stone pillar that contains seven plaques of religious prayers. FFRF claims that the placement of these prayers violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, because it amounts, in their view, to an endorsement of the Christian religion.

FFRF, unfortunately, fails to understand that prayers, as well as other religious symbols that grace government buildings and monuments, are simply the 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 sheweth 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?"). Yet another example is the Christian iconography beautifully displayed in Tiffany stained glass windows at the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

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."

We realize that it can be somewhat intimidating to receive a letter quoting many Supreme Court cases, quotes that appear to take aim against the inscription on the courthouse cornerstone. One case apparently missed by Americans United, however, is the 2005 case of *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, in which Chief Justice Rehnquist for the Court wrote that the proper analysis to apply to the use of religious texts on monuments/buildings is the nature of the monument/building and our Nation's history (545 U.S. at 686). 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.

You stand in the good company of many other governmental institutions that prominently feature visual reminders of our nation's invaluable religious history. Perhaps more importantly, we want you to know that you are not alone – we support you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you believe you need any assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,



Lea Carawan

Executive Director

Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation