



CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

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August 2, 2018

Dean Winters
Chief of Police
112 S. Main St.
Crandall, TX 75114

Dear Chief Winters:

I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation. The Foundation serves the 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 32 states, which have over 1,000 state senators and state representatives in these Legislative Prayer Caucuses. We believe in the power of prayer, and we believe that Americans in all walks of life (including public officials) have the freedom to express their belief in God, and to give glory to God at any time. This freedom is at the core of the First Amendment, since it involves free speech and the free exercise of religion.

It has come to our attention that several weeks ago, an attorney from the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF") sent you a letter complaining of your selection of the Newsboys' "God's Not Dead" song in a lip sync competition.

It is clear that constitutional, historical and legal precedent affirms that you are within your rights, and are not violating anyone's religious freedom. I am sure the good citizens of Crandall are not in fear of being arrested on Sunday morning outside church by the Crandall Police Department. We would further wager that a Crandall motorist would not get out of a traffic violation if he recited the Lord's Prayer, or out of a DUI if he said the Apostle's Creed (or the lyrics to *God's Not Dead*). Officially, you and your officers show no favoritism to the religious, irreligious, and areligious. Unofficially, you like to have a little fun, which was certainly evident in the video.

We sent a copy of FFRF's letter to our Chief Counsel, Dr. Jim Davids, who teaches constitutional law at Regent University. Dr. Davids has an interest in the

First Amendment, and has written law review articles on the First Amendment in the early days of our Republic. Jim remarked that the author of the letter does not have much appreciation of constitutional history. This history shows floor debates and OFFICIAL acts by both Congress and the President in which they invoked orthodox Christianity. On the FLOOR of the Constitutional Convention itself Dr. Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most secular of all the delegates attending the Convention, referenced the Bible three times when he stated:

“I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that **God** governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that "except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel. . .

I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.”

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/benfranklin.htm>

The presiding officer at that Convention, Mr. Washington, had of course additional public duties after the Convention ended, and the First Congress, which drafted the First Amendment, officially asked President Washington to proclaim a day of Thanksgiving so all Americans could honor God. Acting officially as the President, Mr. Washington issued a presidential proclamation asking all Americans to devote themselves “to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation.” Mr. Washington did not, however, stop at just asking Americans to give thanks to God. He also asked all Americans to “beseech [the great Lord and Ruler of Nations] to pardon our national and other transgressions . . .”

John Adams, Mr. Washington’s successor, in *another official* presidential proclamation, returned to the subject of national sins and invoked the names of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity when he officially asked that “all religious congregations do, with the deepest humility, acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation, beseeching Him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offenses, and to incline us by His Holy Spirit to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor and heavenly benediction ...”

The official proclamations by our first two presidents, however, were not as religious as the *official* March 30, 1963 proclamation by the 16th President, Mr. Lincoln. During the depths of the greatest crisis our nation experienced, Mr. Lincoln issued a presidential proclamation imploring the American citizens to confess their sins and seek God’s mercy, since only those nations that acknowledge God as Lord are blessed. Mr. Lincoln’s proclamation in part states:

[I]t is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. . . .

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

“It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

[Presidential Proclamations for Thanksgiving and Prayer can be found at <http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/thanksgiving-day-proclamations-1789-present>]

Chief Winters, your choice of *God’s Not Dead* to lip sync is FAR less an endorsement of religion than expressed OFFICIALLY by our nation’s founders and President Lincoln. Franklin, Washington, Adams and Lincoln are revered today for what they did for our nation, including their official pronouncements. That’s pretty good company to keep! The cases cited by FFRF dealt with instances in which governmental power was being used to promote religion. Your selection of a song to lip sync did not use whatever governmental power you possess – the government did not punish anyone who failed to watch the video and become a Christian, and did not reward anyone who did so. Thanks for your continuing service.

Sincerely,

Lea Carawan, Executive Director
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation