



CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

October 3, 2019

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The Honorable Henry McMaster
Governor, State of South Carolina
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: Prayer Before News Conferences on Hurricane Dorian

Dear Governor McMaster:

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 a network of Legislative Prayer Caucuses in nearly 40 states, including South Carolina, which has over 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 from news reports that the Freedom from Religion Foundation ("FFRF") sent you a letter complaining about news conferences concerning Hurricane Dorian that were opened in prayer. According to the Greenville News in its September 26 edition, your spokesman Brian Symmes remarked, "For as long as Henry McMaster is the governor of South Carolina, and we have to prepare for these dangerous storms, there will be a chaplain saying a prayer before each of those press conferences. For every person who may get offended, countless South Carolinians likely gain strength, guidance, and comfort from these prayers." We applaud you for using your First Amendment freedom in positive ways that encourage the citizens of South Carolina and urge you to continue opening all press conferences and other public meetings with prayer regardless of weather conditions!

As you know, public officials in their official capacity speak about religion, quote Bible verses for various purposes, and offer prayers almost every day throughout our nation. Weekly when Congress is in session, the Congressional Prayer Caucus meets in Room 219 of the U.S. Capitol and prays. Before the U.S. House and Senate start their session, a publicly paid chaplain prays in the publicly supported Capitol asking for God's blessing. The same practice, though not normally with a publicly paid chaplain, occurs in most state capitols, as well as many cities, villages, and counties throughout our country.

On the National Day of Prayer, many official government proclamations, prepared by paid government staff, cascade out of government offices (probably including yours) -- from the White House all the way down to local city halls. They frequently are placed on public websites. From the earliest beginnings of this nation, we have honored the role of prayer and depended upon it in good times and bad.

On national holidays, inauguration days, and on other momentous occasions, presidents and governors have often presented the nation with a message from Scripture or have called upon the nation to seek God's favor, protection, and mercy. Nationally, it began with President George Washington, but such religious messages from public officials had long been part of American history since colonial times.

President Washington, as an example, proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving and urged all Americans to honor God. Acting officially as the President, he 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," to "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," and "to pardon our national and other transgressions" This proclamation was printed by government printing presses and distributed by government employees, as were similar proclamations of other presidents to our present day.

During the depths of the greatest crisis our nation experienced, President Lincoln implored American citizens to confess their sins and seek God's mercy through prayer:

[!]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.

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

As the Supreme Court stated in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, 313-314 (1952), "We 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." Nothing in the history of this nation has ever required elected public officials to separate their religious viewpoint from their public persona and official communications.

If we can be of any service to you on this issue, feel free to contact us. We have First Amendment lawyers on staff who will work with you, without charge, if you need their services. To protect our freedom, we must exercise that freedom, and it is encouraging to see your leadership in our First Amendment freedoms.

May God bless you and the great State of South Carolina,



Lea Carawan

Executive Director

Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation

National Strategic Center