



October 8, 2019

CONGRESSIONAL
ADVISORY MEMBERS

Senator James Lankford
Congressman Mark Walker
Congressman Rick Crawford
Senator John Boozman
Senator Marsha Blackburn
Senator Kevin Cramer
Congressman Robert Aderholt
Congressman Brian Babin
Congressman John Carter
Congressman Mike Conaway
Congressman Jeff Fortenberry
Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler
Congressman Jody Hice
Congressman Richard Hudson
Congressman Bill Huizenga
Congressman Doug Lamborn
Congressman Chris Smith
Congressman Glenn Thompson
Congressman Tim Walberg
Congressman Joe Wilson
Congressman Robert Wittman

The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor, State of Tennessee
State Capitol, 1st Floor
600 Charlotte Ave.
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Day of Fasting and Prayer

Dear Governor Lee:

As you may remember from the letter I sent supporting your inaugural worship service, 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 Tennessee, 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 applaud your decision to call the citizens of Tennessee to a day of prayer, humility and fasting. Your Proclamation very appropriately calls upon Tennessee citizens to seek forgiveness for acts of injustice, discrimination, and oppression, and the very real sins of indifference, pride and greed. We further applaud your asking Tennessee citizens to give thanks to God for His many blessings, and in humility to seek God's wisdom and guidance. We fully expect God to honor these prayers on October 10 and heal Tennessee in a tangible way (2 Chronicles 7:14).

We understand that some people are criticizing your proclamation and undoubtedly claiming that you are conflating church and state. Public celebration of religion by public officials, however, is very consistent with our nation's history and tradition. 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:

[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.

[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. Claiborn*, 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. Your Proclamation for Prayer, Humility, and Fasting follows a long tradition of our nation's leaders (even Thomas

Jefferson, who refused to proclaim a day of fasting and thanksgiving as President, nevertheless proclaimed such days when he was Governor of Virginia).

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 Tennessee,

Lea Carawan
Executive Director
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation
National Strategic Center