



CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

January 6, 2020

Via email (mschutzbach@effinghamil.com) and U.S. Mail

Hon. Mike Schutzbach
Mayor, City of Effingham
201 E. Jefferson Ave
Effingham, IL 62401

Re: Cross on Mural Painting

Dear Mayor Schutzbach and City Commissioners:

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 nearly 40 states, including Illinois, which have over 1,000 state senators and state representatives as members. These leaders are working together to preserve the integrity of our first principles and protect First Amendment rights for all.

We understand that the City recently received a letter from the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF") asking that the City remove a cross from a mural painted on the Raney Street overpass. We understand that FFRF claims that this mural, which depicts a very large U.S. flag that dominates the mural, the rolling Illinois countryside, and a white cross set in a breaking dawn, violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. We assume that this tasteful piece of art, which beautifies the overpass, is not objectionable to FFRF except for the white cross. That is, we assume that the prominent flag is unobjectionable, since it exemplifies the secular value of patriotism, which we assume the vast majority of Effingham citizens share. We also assume that FFRF does not object to the fertile Illinois hills depicted in the mural, since this is a characteristic of central Illinois, and therefore Effingham. We also assume that FFRF does not object to the mural's depiction of the dawn, something that we in

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Congressman Joe Wilson
Congressman Robert Wittman

Chesapeake, VA share with Effingham and FFRF's home of Madison, WI. Therefore, this leaves the white cross as the only thing on the mural to which FFRF objects.

However, isn't a white cross the most prominent structure in Effingham? Isn't the white cross at the juncture of I-57 and I-70 the thing that travelers between Chicago (or Terre Haute) and St. Louis remember most about Effingham? I just looked at the photos of Effingham on Google Maps, and these photos are dominated by the giant cross. Isn't this white cross highly associated with Effingham, and therefore, the white cross on the rolling fertile green hill in the mural is simply a depiction of Effingham? If so, then it has a *secular* purpose, and not a *religious* purpose, and therefore the cross is perfectly appropriate to include in a mural depicting Effingham.

We understand, moreover, that the mural was not commissioned nor paid for by the City, but by a private group – the Effingham High School Football Moms. Although the Raney overpass is presumably City property (unless the Moms have leased this property or otherwise own the rights to display the mural), since the City did not commission or pay for the work, the City has not endorsed any religious meaning in this overwhelmingly patriotic mural depicting Effingham.

Contrary to FFRF's claims, the Constitution does not demand that all references to religion and symbolism that has religious roots or connotations be removed from public buildings and grounds. Such an interpretation would mean that our national motto, "In God We Trust," could not be displayed and that symbols like doves and olive branches would have to be scrubbed from public places and state seals.

Biblical references, as well as other religious symbols that grace government buildings and monuments, are 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?"). Perhaps even more pertinent is an observation made by our Chief Counsel, who tried cases in Cook County, Illinois for 25 years, and who said that each courtroom in Cook County is adorned with the phrase "In God We Trust."

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. Certainly this is the message conveyed recently by the Supreme Court in the Bladensburg Cross case – *American Legion v. American Humanist Association* (2019). 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.”

Mayor and Commissioners, take courage and reject the arguments of the atheists. The symbol of the white cross on the privately-commissioned mural is a secular reminder of Effingham or, at most, an acknowledgment of our nation's (and Effingham's) religious heritage and tradition. We feel so strongly about this issue that we offer to the City our specialists in First Amendment law to serve the City without cost, if the need arises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lea Carawan".

Lea Carawan
Executive Director
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation
National Strategic Center