



CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

January 20, 2020

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SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL

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Dr. Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

General John W. Raymond
First Chief of Space Operations
Air Force Space Command
150 Vandenberg St., Ste 1105
Peterson AFB, CO 80914-4500

Re: U.S. Space Force Designation of Official Bible

Dear Secretary Esper and General Raymond:

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, 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 have learned that recently, the Freedom From Religion Foundation wrote both of you a letter complaining of a ceremony in which religious leaders blessed a King James Bible to be used for U.S. Space Force swearing-in ceremonies. It is, of course, not news that public officials take their oath of office with their hand on a Bible. This tradition has been followed by every President and most members of Congress (one or two have preferred the Koran, and some do not take the oath of office with any sacred book). Overwhelmingly, however, the Presidents and members of Congress have used the Bible to solemnize their oath, and most have also

added “so help me God” to the official oath. This tradition goes back at least to 1789, when President Washington recited his first oath of office.

FFRF’s letter makes several untruthful assertions that deserve highlighting. FFRF assumes that only the “officially blessed” Bible will be used for swearing in ceremonies. The news stories do not state this as a fact, nor does it logically flow that the blessing of one Bible will result in only its use for swearing in ceremonies. We suspect that if a serviceman prefers his own Bible or other sacred text, or prefers none at all, the serviceman will still be given the oath of office. This, of course, completely negates the arguments made by FFRF regarding exclusivity and the “Religion Test.”

We commend you for designating a Bible. Frankly, we can think of no source better than the Bible for wisdom, particularly in books like Proverbs (Prov. 3:13: “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding” or Prov. 3:7: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil”) or the Gospels. Jesus gave us wisdom by declaring that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, and we should treat others like we want to be treated. Can anyone (including the co-presidents of FFRF) dispute the wisdom of loving others as much as we love ourselves, or treating others with the love and respect that we also want? Wouldn’t the leadership and staff of FFRF, the citizens of Madison, Wisconsin where FFRF is located, and everyone in the U.S be better off if we took to heart this wisdom?

This belief that the Bible’s wisdom can lead all of us to better relations with our family and neighbors is not only our opinion, it is also the opinion of our nation’s Founders. Our second President, John Adams, wrote the following to Dr. Benjamin Rush (also a signer of the Declaration of Independence) on February 2, 1807: “The Bible contains the most profound philosophy, the most perfect morality, and the most refined policy, that ever was conceived upon earth. It is the most republican book in the world, and therefore I will still revere it. ... [W]ithout national morality a republican government cannot be maintained.” Patrick Henry described the Bible as “a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed,” and John Dickinson, who served as governor of both Pennsylvania and Delaware and was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention stated that the Bible “has done more good than all the books in the world; would do much more, if duly regarded; and might lead the objectors against it to happiness, if they would value it as they should.” Dr. Benjamin Rush wrote “that there is no book of its size in the whole world, that contains so much useful knowledge for the government of states, or the direction of the affairs of individuals as the Bible.”

For many Founders, the Bible was much more than merely a book of useful knowledge and wisdom, it was also the “Word of God,” providing divine guidance in matters of faith and practice. John Jay, the president of the Continental Congress, a co-author of *The Federalist*

Papers, and the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, wrote that “the Bible is the best of all Books, for it is the word of God, and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it, and to regulate your life by its precepts.”

John Jay’s and others’ veneration of the Bible was not shared universally by all the Founders. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin appeared to doubt the divine revelation of the Bible, yet Jefferson called Jesus’ moral teachings to be “the most benevolent and sublime probably that has been ever taught,” and Franklin thought that Jesus’ system of morals was “the best the world ever saw or is like to see.”¹

Secretary Esper and General Raymond, the Space Force obviously is in good company in venerating the Bible. Although we would never claim the same level of wisdom or stature of the Founders, we too believe that the wisdom of the Bible is just as relevant today for America as it was during the Founding Era. May God bless you and the new U.S. Space Force.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lea Carawan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lea Carawan

Executive Director

Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation

National Strategic Center