



# CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS FOUNDATION

February 18, 2021

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Via email – [president@boisestate.edu](mailto:president@boisestate.edu)  
And U.S. Mail

Dr. Marlene Tromp  
President  
Boise State University  
1910 University Drive  
Boise, ID 83725

Re: University Athletic Chaplaincy Program

Dear Dr. Tromp:

I have the honor of serving as the VP of Operations 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 over 40 states, including Idaho, which have over 1000 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 understand that the University received a letter from the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF"), which complained of the university's affiliation with Pastor Mark Thornton, who joins the football team on the sidelines, attends away games, holds chapel the evening before the game, joins student-led prayers before each game, leads weekly Bible studies, and is available for prayer and counseling with student-athletes. Having seen other similar FFRF letters (but not the one to Boise State), we suspect that FFRF cited a number of Supreme Court cases, urged Boise State to discontinue its affiliation with Pastor Thornton, and urged the university to take the

opportunity to instruct its community about the importance of separating religion from campus life and programs.

Thank you for taking this opportunity to teach the community that it is, in fact, permissible under our Constitution to have a university chaplain. We have seen the Boise State News release of December 18, 2020 that announced the university's decision to retain the services of Pastor Thornton. We commend the university's lawyers for their research and correct conclusion that the services of a team chaplain are protected by the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause. In addition, these services are not prohibited by the Establishment Clause.

As your attorneys may have told you, more than 25 years ago in *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983), a state legislator challenged his legislature's practice of hiring a chaplain (always a Christian of the same denomination) who always opened the legislative sessions with a Judeo-Christian prayer. The legislator contended that this practice violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, a contention soundly rejected by the Supreme Court, which upheld the constitutionality of the chaplain's position. Similar principles, of course, apply to the Boise State University chaplain program.

Chaplains play a vital secular role in providing counseling, comfort and solace to others, including students. You were absolutely correct when you stated for the press release about the prayer after the BSU/BYU football game, "I was so moved by the players' ability to reach across a divide to one another in a difficult time. We need more love in the world — especially with all the crises we've faced this year — and this was a sure sign of it. I will always support Pastor Thornton, who has been a generous friend and spiritual advisor to me as well." Rest assured that you are not alone in recognizing the importance of chaplains in our society.

We have lawyers on staff who will work for free to protect First Amendment Rights. Thank you for your support of religious freedom and our country's history and tradition.

Sincerely,



Lea Carawan  
VP Of Operations  
Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation  
National Strategic Center