

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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May 7, 2018

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & FAX: 307-632-3909**

The Honorable Matt Mead  
Idelman Mansion  
2323 Carey Ave.  
Cheyenne, WY 82002

Re: Participation in National Day of Prayer event

Dear Governor Mead:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your continued participation in, and promotion of, National Day of Prayer events. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 33,000 members across the country, including members in Wyoming. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that your office emailed every Wyoming state employee reminding them that Thursday, May 3, was the National Day of Prayer and that there would be an observance ceremony at noon where you would read a National Day of Prayer proclamation. A copy of the proclamation was included in the email and references our “spiritual heritage.”

As you may be aware, the National Day of Prayer is a sectarian event. It originated with the Reverend Billy Graham during his evangelical crusade in Washington, D.C. in 1952. He expressed an openly Christian purpose, seeking an annual prayer proclamation by the President because he wanted “the Lord Jesus Christ” to be recognized across the land. Subsequently, the National Day of Prayer Task Force was created to “communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, mobilizing the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership.” The task force issues annual National Day of Prayer proclamations and submits them to the President, choosing a theme with supporting scripture from the bible. This year’s theme is “Pray for America – UNITY” based upon the New Testament verse Ephesians 4:3.

In its announcement of the theme for 2018, the task force reveals that its idea of “unity” amounts to religious assimilation through proselytization. It writes that “our greatest need” is “the next great move of God in America,” which it hopes “will catapult the message of the gospel nationally and internationally.”<sup>1</sup> The task force has a Statement of Faith that is exclusive to Christians, including that “The Holy Bible is the inspired, only, infallible, authoritative Word of The Living God” and a belief in “the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

As Governor, you represent a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also atheists and agnostics who do not believe in prayer. Your active participation in, and promotion of, the National Day of Prayer in your official capacity unabashedly promotes a religious event, sending an official message of

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<sup>1</sup> *Theme and Verse – National Day of Prayer Theme for 2018*, NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER TASK FORCE (last visited Apr. 24, 2018), [http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/theme\\_and\\_verse](http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/theme_and_verse).

<sup>2</sup> *Statement of Faith*, NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER TASK FORCE (last visited Apr. 24, 2018), [www.nationaldayofprayer.org/statement\\_of\\_faith](http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/statement_of_faith).

endorsement of religion over non-religion and of exclusion to the 24% of Americans, including 38% of young Americans, who are not religious.<sup>3</sup> It alienates non-Christians and nonbelievers in Wyoming by turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

The Establishment Clause in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. The Supreme Court has said time and again that the “First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947). Your participation in this event in your official capacity and your use of government resources to promote this event sends the message that your government office and the state of Wyoming prefer the Christian faith.

The separation between state and church is among one of the most fundamental principles of our system of government. The Supreme Court has specifically stated, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that **no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.**” *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (emphasis added).

Government officials can worship, pray, and participate in religious events in their personal capacities. But they are not permitted to provide credibility or prestige to their religion by lending a government office and government title to religious events. Their office and title belong to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant. As Governor, you have taken an oath of office to uphold the secular U.S. Constitution, and must scrupulously avoid using your public office to promote or advance your personal religious beliefs.

As a matter of policy, government sponsorship of a National Day of Prayer event is inappropriate and unnecessary. Promotion of prayer by elected officials raises the distasteful appearance of political pandering to appeal to or appease a vocal Christian evangelical constituency, and even when other faiths are included in prayer events, the nonbelievers are still excluded. If you truly wish to participate in an event dedicated to unity, you could do far better than the National Day of Prayer.

As Governor, you are charged with great responsibility and have been given significant trust by citizens, including those citizens who may not share your personal religious viewpoints. Leaving prayer as a private matter for private citizens is the wisest public policy. (As an aside: government action which may suggest that such civic duties require divine intervention hardly inspires public confidence.)

We appreciate the courtesy of your attention to this matter, and encourage you to stand up for the precious constitutional principle of the separation between church and state, which unites and protects all citizens, believers and non-believers alike.

Very truly,

  
Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-Presidents

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<sup>3</sup> Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), available at [www.ppri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf](http://www.ppri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf).