

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 17, 2018

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:**  
**sen.mark.green@capitol.tn.gov**

The Honorable Mark Green  
State Senator  
425 5th Avenue North  
Ste. 748, Cordell Hull Bldg.  
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Inappropriate use of governmental position to promote religion

Dear Dr. Green:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation regarding your admission that you base policy decisions on the effect such decisions will have on winning converts to your personal religion. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 32,000 members across the country, including 400 members in Tennessee and a state chapter in Knoxville. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned constituent recently alerted us to a video in which you make the following statement to explain why you opposed Medicaid expansion in Tennessee:

If you go and study the gospels, every person who came to Christ came to Christ with a physical need. . . . People go to God because of a physical need and they walk away with a spiritual need met. That's the story of the Gospels. And so government has stepped in, at least in this country, and done all the work for the church. And so the person who's in need goes—they look to the government for the answer, not God. And I think, in that way, government has done an injustice that's even bigger than just the entitlement—creation of an entitlement welfare state. I think it's even bigger. And in this setting, I'll share the story, I think it interrupts the opportunity for people to come to a saving knowledge of who God is.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Travis J. Tritten, *Army secretary nominee Mark Green: Public healthcare stops people from being saved by Christianity*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (May 4, 2017).

This is a shocking display of hubris and callousness to admit that you would be willing to deny constituents benefits, in this case possibly life-saving healthcare, because you conclude that constituents will then allegedly “look to the government for the answer, not God.”

May we remind you that you have taken an oath to uphold the U.S. and Tennessee constitutions:

Every person who shall be chosen or appointed to any office of trust or profit under this Constitution, or any law made in pursuance thereof, shall, before entering on the duties thereof, take an oath to support the Constitution of this State, and of the United States, and an oath of office. (Article X Section 1 of the Tennessee Constitution)

Let us also remind you that the United States was first among nations to adopt a godless Constitution, whose only references to religion are exclusionary, such as that there shall be no religious test for public office. The wise framers of our secular Constitution knew that there can be no true liberty if the government takes sides on religion, which is why they deliberately placed sovereignty not in a divinity, but in “We, the People.”

The preamble of our Constitution, Senator Green, reads:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, *promote the general Welfare*, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. [emphasis added]

The preamble certainly indicates the framers themselves were concerned with general welfare, and charged lawmakers with promoting it, not their personal religious beliefs.

The Tennessee Constitution itself affirms that no citizen can be

“compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any minister against his consent; that no human authority can, in any case whatever control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and that no preference shall ever be given, by law to any religious establishment or mode of worship.” (Article 1, Section 3)

Your comments about your decision-making process in the Medicaid expansion vote indicate very clearly that you are violating the spirit of both the U.S. and Tennessee State constitutions. The Supreme Court has explained that “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.” *Va. State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943).

Today, nearly a quarter of adults in the U.S. identify as nonreligious, and additional 6 percent identify as believers in faiths other than Christianity, and that number is rising.<sup>2</sup> Among millennials and younger Americans, those born after 1981, 34–36 percent are unaffiliated, and 8 percent practice a minority religion.<sup>3</sup> You may view this trend away from Christianity as a threat to your personal religion, but it is not appropriate for you to use your governmental position to try to influence your constituents’ religious views by sabotaging constituents’ healthcare rights, or any other legislation to improve lives that you feel would interfere with forcing individuals to “turn to God.”

The constitutional separation between state and church is the crown jewel of the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing that Americans will not be told by their government what to believe on matters of religion. We would ask that you take a moment to reread both constitutions you have taken oaths to uphold.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-Presidents

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<sup>2</sup> *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 12, 2015), available at [www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*