

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

November 15, 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: thomasbeach@schouse.gov

The Honorable Thomas Beach
South Carolina House of Representatives
1105 Pendleton Street Blatt Building, Room 306-D
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: Divisive religious proselytizing in constituent communications

Dear Representative Beach:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to citizen concerns over religious proselytizing in your official capacity as a South Carolina Representative. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including members in South Carolina. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

One of your constituents contacted us to report that you sent them a “birthday card” with a proselytizing message that encouraged them to dedicate their life to Jesus and repent their sins:

Another year of life upon this earth.

I hope you have used it well and to the fullest. I do encourage you to dedicate your life to our Father in Heaven. It was He who gave us life.

It is up to us on what we do with it and we will give an account for it. The world might be chaotic, broken, and crazy, but I have found a simple solution.

Repent of your sins, and place your faith in Jesus.

I pray the Lord places a hedge of protection around you and your family.

Happy Birthday!

Sincerely,

Rep. Thomas Beach

We write to request that you cease using your elected position as a State Representative to promote your personal religious beliefs. You are free to practice your religion in your personal capacity, but you cannot abuse your position as a government official to impose religion on or to proselytize your constituents in your official capacity.

As a government official, you are tasked with upholding the Constitution of the United States—including the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. By proselytizing to your constituents in your official capacity, you do the opposite. You serve a religiously diverse community that consists not only of Christians but also Jewish, Muslim, atheist and other non-Christian constituents. When you promote Christianity through constituent communications, you needlessly alienate those constituents who are part of the thirty-seven percent of Americans who are non-Christian, including the nearly one in three Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated.¹ You send the message that you and your office not only prefer those citizens who are religious, but that you prefer those who subscribe to Christianity over all other religions.

Government employees can worship, pray, and practice their religion however they wish when acting in their personal capacities. But they are not permitted to provide prestige to their personal religion through the machinery of a government office including official communications. Your elected office belongs to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant. As a State Representative, you are charged with great responsibility and have been given significant trust by citizens in your community, including those citizens who do not share your religious viewpoint.

We ask you to honor the Constitution you were elected to uphold and respect your constitutional obligations. You were elected to represent your constituents, not to preach to them. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

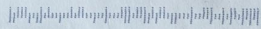
¹ Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.



Thomas Beach
Member, SC House of Representatives
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