

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: sgreene@wilkescounty.net, cjohnson@wilkescounty.net, [kelmore@wilkescounty.net](mailto:kelmores@wilkescounty.net), bsexton@wilkescounty.net, gminton@wilkescounty.net

Stoney Greene, Chairman
Wilkes County Board of Commissioners
Wilkes County Offices
110 North Street
Wilkesboro, NC 28697

Re: SECOND REQUEST: Rescind “Christian Heritage” Proclamation

Dear Wilkes County Board:

We are renewing our request of Dec. 20, 2023,¹ that the Board rescind its ill-advised and unconstitutional “Christian Heritage” proclamation during the holiday season and “all year long.”

We understand that county boards are often called on to make proclamations by members of the public and interested organizations, and that in the rush of Board business, the Board likely adopted this proclamation without realizing it is comprised largely of bogus claims. The county board of supervisors in El Dorado, Calif., likewise approved a similar proclamation designating every July “American Christian Heritage Month,”² then realized its error and rescinded the proclamation. We urge you to follow this example for the integrity of the Board and do the same at your next meeting.

Attached, please find a memo carefully analyzing and fact-checking each paragraph of the proclamation, along with our rebuttal and corrections to the record. The memo clearly shows why it is incumbent upon the Board to rescind this error-filled and misleading proclamation, which is full of bogus, distorted, phony or bowdlerized quotes. We want to make clear, however, that even were all of the quotations about the personal religious views of certain Founders true in wording and in context, the county would still lack the authority to direct the religious consciences of its constituents by declaring every year to be “Christian Heritage” year. The

¹ Letter to Wilkes County Board of Commissioners from FFRF Attorney Chris Line, Dec. 20, 2023:
<https://ffrf.us/3Hm6x39>

² El Dorado County Board of Supervisors rescinds American Christian Heritage Month proclamation, ABC 10, Sept. 19, 2023:
<https://ffrf.us/48WnCws>

private or individual religious beliefs of certain figures in U.S. history, including certain Founders, speak to their personal views but are irrelevant to the fact that the framers of our secular Constitution were first among nations to deliberately adopt a constitution separating religion from government. The U.S. Constitution omits any reference to a deity, bars any religious test for public office or government establishment of religion and invests sovereignty not in a king or deity, but in “We the People.”

As President Thomas Jefferson noted in turning down requests to make religious proclamations during his terms in office: “Civil powers alone have been given to the President of the U.S. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.” Jefferson added, “I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline or its doctrines.”³ It is audacity indeed for the Wilkes County Board to imagine it has the authority that Jefferson spurned.

But the most egregious problem is the conclusion of your proclamation — in contravention of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment — instructing citizens to “proclaim and recognize our Christian Heritage and *urge all citizens to proclaim Christianity’s important influence in the foundation and life of our County, State, and Nation.*” [emphasis added]

The county and its board have no authority whatsoever to “urge all citizens to proclaim Christianity’s importance,” any more than the Board could command all county citizens to attend a particular church or proclaim “atheism’s importance.” Not all citizens have the same beliefs. It is hard to conjure up a more egregious example of governmental overreach in injuring freedom of conscience and coercing citizens about religion than this concluding directive. Government has no religion and cannot take sides over religion. Citizens can value or believe in any religion — or none at all.

Please see the attached memo. We urge you to protect the integrity of your office by rescinding this proclamation at the earliest possible time.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President, Freedom From Religion Foundation

³ Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 23 January 1808 (founders.archives.gov): <https://ffrf.us/41YXpLe>