

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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May 31, 2022

**SENT VIA FAX AND U.S. MAIL: (202) 228-6965**

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
328 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Your shocking and inappropriate remarks blaming the “secularization of society” for school shootings

Dear Senator Johnson:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Wisconsin membership to object to your abhorrent recent comments blaming the “secularization of society” for the horrific shooting that took place in Uvalde, Texas. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 37,000 members across the country, including more than 900 members and a local chapter in Arizona. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism. As you are aware, FFRF represents a secular membership of American citizens who identify as atheist, agnostic, humanist, freethinker or otherwise as nonbelievers, and we work to uphold our secular form of government. Therefore your undeserved remarks, seeming to blame gun massacres on this all-American principle of secular government, and even upon our members who work for this principle, are highly objectionable.

Like you and the rest of the nation, we are appalled and saddened by the shooting at Robb Elementary School. We join others in decrying this senseless violence and in demanding *meaningful* reform to protect our school children — something you as a senator can bring about.

On May 25, 2022, you went on The Conservative Circus w/ James T. Harris, a right-wing radio show that is very aptly named, and blamed the “secularization of society” and “loss of faith” for Tuesday’s mass shooting.<sup>1</sup> You also claimed: “The solution is renewed faith.”<sup>2</sup>

You ignorantly claim that “renewed faith” will solve the rampant epidemic of gun violence in our country, particularly in our schools, but the evidence does not bear this out. Scientific studies<sup>3</sup> show that societies and states with less religion have less violence:

Murder rates are actually lower in more secular nations and higher in more

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdcRLKmejWQ>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> In a synthesis of the latest social scientific research concerning some of these issues *see* Zuckerman, Phil. 2009. ‘Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions.’ *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 3 Issue 6, 949-971.

religious nations where belief in God is deep and widespread. And within America, the states with the highest murder rates tend to be highly religious, such as Louisiana and Alabama, but the states with the lowest murder rates tend to be among the least religious in the country, such as Vermont and Oregon. Furthermore, although there are some notable exceptions, rates of most violent crimes tend to be lower in the less religious states and higher in the most religious states. Finally, of the top 50 safest cities in the world, nearly all are in relatively nonreligious countries, and of the eight cities within the United States that make the safest-city list, nearly all are located in the least religious regions of the country.<sup>4</sup>

When any given factor of societal health or well-being is measured, invariably the *less* religious countries score better. The *least religious countries* of this world:

- Have the lowest rates of violent crime and homicide
- Are the best place to raise children and be a mother
- Have the lowest rates of corruption
- Have the lowest levels of intolerance against racial and ethnic minorities
- Score highest when it comes to women's rights and gender equality
- Have the greatest protection and enjoyment of political and civil liberties
- Are better at educating their youth in reading, math, and science
- Are the most peaceful and the most prosperous
- Have the highest quality of life.<sup>5</sup>

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well-being also exists within the United States. Those states that are the most religious also have a high occurrence of societal ills.<sup>6</sup> States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation have the highest rates of violent crime and murder.<sup>7</sup>

These studies do not prove that religion causes *all* of society's ills, but do reveal that Christianity and more faith are not a panacea and are actually counterproductive. As Thomas Paine said, "Accustom a people to believe that priests or any other class of men can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance."<sup>8</sup> The religious concept of sin — and easy absolution or forgiveness for sin based on profession of faith — can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Many politicians cite the 1962 Supreme Court decision *Engel v. Vitale*, which ruled that school-sponsored prayers in public schools violate the First Amendment, as the point where we "removed God from schools," blaming this for school shootings ever since. In reality,

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<sup>4</sup> Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>5</sup> Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>6</sup> States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation have the highest rates of poverty, obesity, infant mortality, STDs, teen pregnancy, as well as, the lowest percentage of college educated adults. Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>7</sup> Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted)

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Paine, A Letter to Camille Jordan (1797), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, (GP Putnam's Sons, 1896) IV:252. Available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=srpGH65Zl9kC&pg=PA252>

there were school shootings before that case, dating as far back as public schools themselves, and there was no spike in school shootings immediately following the ruling.

Furthermore, we hasten to observe that the biblical deity, which you imply would prevent mass shootings, is depicted as one of the greatest mass murderers<sup>9</sup> in all literature.<sup>10</sup> In 2 Chronicles alone, the villain of the Old Testament killed a million Ethiopians<sup>11</sup> and half a million Israelites.<sup>12</sup> That's in addition to destroying every human on earth, save eight,<sup>13</sup> razing entire cities,<sup>14</sup> and repeatedly committing and commanding genocide.<sup>15</sup>

School shootings are a real-world problem that requires a real-world solution, not a plea for nonexistent supernatural intervention. Atheists and agnostics and others unaffiliated with religion — who now comprise three-in-ten adult Americans at 29 percent of the population<sup>16</sup> — are some of the most avid supporters of gun safety reform, while evangelical Christians are among the least.<sup>17</sup> In fact, 94 percent of FFRF's members support stricter gun laws.<sup>18</sup>

As a U.S. senator, your duty is to support the U.S. Constitution, which is godless and entirely secular, and to protect the rights of *all* citizens regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. Your promotion of religion, prayer and Christianity as a false panacea for this crisis is insulting and demeaning to non-religious and non-Christian citizens. Young Americans are less religious than ever, with atheism doubling among Generation Z, and they are demanding real action to stop the school shooting epidemic. Rather than advocating for more prayer, we ask you to “Get off your knees and get to work!”

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-presidents  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

ALG/DB:cal

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<sup>9</sup> See [unpleasantgod.ffrf.org/#/](http://unpleasantgod.ffrf.org/#/) (Check out in particular the links for bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser, infanticidal, genocidal)

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., [www.vocativ.com/news/309748/all-the-people-god-kills-in-the-bible/index.html](http://www.vocativ.com/news/309748/all-the-people-god-kills-in-the-bible/index.html).

<sup>11</sup> 2 Chr. 14:12–13 (“The Lord smote the [thousand thousand] Ethiopians ... they were destroyed before the Lord”).

<sup>12</sup> 2 Chr. 13:17 (“There fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men”).

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 6:9–9:17.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 18–19.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Deut. 20:16–18 (commanding his people to “not leave alive anything that breathes... completely destroy them ...”).

<sup>16</sup> “About three-in-ten U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, Pew Research Center, Dec. 14, 2021 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/#:~:text=Currently%2C%20about%20three%2Din%2D,asked%20about%20their%20religius%20identity>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://religionnews.com/2019/08/29/which-religions-support-gun-control-in-the-us/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/37966-ffrf-releases-major-secular-voter-poll-we-are-the-real-values-voters>