

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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The Honorable Adam Wright
Mayor
120 S. Kansas Ave.
P.O. Box 356
Haven, KS 67543

Re: Inappropriate and Unconstitutional Religious Endorsement — Endorse ‘E Pluribus
Unum’ Instead

Dear Mayor Wright and City Council members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the City’s misguided decision to backtrack on removing “In God We Trust” from its police vehicles. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 37,000 members across the country, including members in Kansas. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

On May 2, 2022, the council laudably asked the local police department to remove the “In God We Trust” decals from vehicles and to stop using its official Facebook page to promote Christianity. FFRF, and many of our area Kansas residents, applauded the council’s actions to cease endorsing religion and to respect the views of all of its citizens, including those who do not believe in a god. It is our understanding that the council has now caved into religious fervor and reversed course after receiving extreme backlash from individuals who have demanded that the city continue endorsing religion by including “In God We Trust” on its property. It is also our understanding that the City is allowing the “In God We Trust” decals to remain on the vehicles with the condition that similar messages supporting other religious beliefs would also be allowed.

As you correctly realized on May 2, it is inappropriate for the City to display “In God We Trust” on government property. Statements about a god have no place on government-owned cars. Public officials should not use their government position and government property to promote their religious views. The City serves all residents of Haven, including those who do not believe in a monotheistic god or any gods.

Citizens interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives. These citizens should not be made to feel offended, excluded, and

like political outsiders because the local government they support with their taxes oversteps its power by prominently placing a religious statement on its vehicles. Nor should the City turn religious citizens into “insiders.” We think you’ll agree that the City and its law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens, and hostility toward others.

Citizens of Haven trust their law enforcement officers to attend to their secular duties. In a time when citizens nationwide are increasingly distrustful of law enforcement officers’ actions, it is frightening and politically dubious for the City to reaffirm to citizens that officers rely on the judgment of a deity rather than on the judgment of the law, or to feel if they are not religious or not Christian that they will be treated as undesirables or second-class citizens by armed police.

The history of the motto “In God We Trust” evinces no secular purpose; on the contrary, the motto was first adopted during the Cold War as a reaction to the purported “godlessness” of Communism. America’s original motto was purely secular—“*E Pluribus Unum*” (“out of many, one”)—and was selected by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. It is a celebration of diversity and pluralism, not religious orthodoxy. “In God We Trust” is thus not even accurate—for it to be accurate, it would have to read, “In God *Some of Us* Trust.”

Overall, nearly 30 percent of Americans today are nonreligious.¹ It stands to reason that at least some of your police force are nonreligious. Having a religious motto on City cars thus also implies a religious test for employment, which is properly barred under Article XI of our godless and entirely secular US Constitution.

On behalf of Haven residents and taxpayers, we urge you to stand by your original decision and remove “In God We Trust” from all City vehicles. The City should respect the rights of conscience of all citizens, including those who in good conscience reject belief in a god. If the City must have decals on its police cars, they should be decals with the original motto, “*E Pluribus Unum*.” FFRF is generously donating 35 vinyl removable decals to the cause, and we ask that the City place them on its police vehicles. Let us know if you need more.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President

ALG:cal

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/.

Enclosures: 35 “*E Pluribus Unum*” decals