

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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October 3, 2019

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:

governor@ky.gov

The Honorable Matt Bevin
Governor of Kentucky
Office of the Governor
700 Capitol Avenue Ste. 100
Frankfort, KY 40601

Re: Use of government position to promote religious event and book

Dear Governor Bevin:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. As you may recall, FFRF is a national nonprofit with more than 30,000 members, including more than 250 members and a state chapter in Kentucky. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public about matters related to nontheism.

Many concerned Kentucky residents contacted us to report that on October 1, 2019, you published a video on your official government social media page of yourself, at your desk, with a bible in front of you, promoting Bring Your Bible to School Day. The post read:

STUDENTS #BringYourBible to School Day is THIS Thursday, Oct. 3!
The Judeo-Christian principles that are bound in this book are timeless,
containing an amazing amount of history, knowledge, wisdom and guidance...
Bring it. Read it. Share it. #WeAreKY¹

Although students are of course welcome to bring any books they want to school, it is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the government to encourage them to bring a particular book one official consider holy. This signals official endorsement of a particular religious text. This post goes even further, directly endorsing the alleged "wisdom and guidance" of the bible and encouraging students not only to bring a bible to school, but also to "Read it" and "Share it." By presumptuously adding "#WeAreKY," you openly suggest that Kentucky is a Christian state and that non-Christians are not part of Kentucky.

The video that accompanied the post was more egregious still. You began by encouraging "every single student in Kentucky," regardless of their religion or lack thereof, to bring a

¹ See, e.g., Kelly Taylor Hayes, *Kentucky governor encourages students to participate in 'Bring Your Bible To School Day'* (Oct. 3, 2019), KTVU, available at www.ktvu.com/news/kentucky-governor-encourages-students-to-participate-in-bring-your-bible-to-school-day.

bible to school. Why would you suggest that the approximately one-in-four Kentucky students who are not Christian participate in this Christian celebration?²

You went on to encourage students to proselytize—to share their bible with “someone who maybe doesn’t have one, who maybe has never read this book.” You call the bible “extraordinary,” and opine that everyone should make this particular holy book “an important part of your life.”

As you know, this is not the first time that our Kentucky members have objected to your abuse of your secular government office to promote your personal religion. In fact, this is at least the fourth time that you have violated your oath of office in this way:

- In 2016, you wrote to you about issuing a “year of the Bible” proclamation, supporting a Christian bible-reading marathon;
- In 2017, we objected to your support of “prayer walks” as an (ineffectual) plan to combat rising violence in Louisville; and
- In 2018, we wrote to you about promoting Bring Your Bible to School Day.

This track record, as well as the over-the-top sectarian divisiveness of this year’s video, leave no doubt that you are willing to sacrifice the fundamental American principles of inclusiveness, tolerance, and secular government in favor of pandering and promoting your personal religion.

You have also shown remarkable obtuseness regarding the bible. This is particularly ironic since you are encouraging students to read, study, and share your chosen holy book, while at the same time repeating historical falsehoods that we have corrected in the past. Many of the bible’s historical claims are contradicted by actual scholarship (*e.g.*, the non-existent enslavement and exodus of the Israelites in Egypt), and much of the book is not only ahistorical, but patently absurd (*e.g.*, a boat full of animals surviving a worldwide flood and repopulating the earth, Jonah surviving in the stomach of a whale, talking donkeys, etc.). Rather than further repeat ourselves to such a slow study, we will simply enclose a copy of our 2018 letter to refresh your memory.

The students of Kentucky are constitutionally entitled to a secular government, including both their public school system and their state leadership. If there is one thing we should be able to agree on, it is that public servants should set aside their personal prejudices and divisive sectarian beliefs so that they can work toward the common good that they were elected for. Governor Bevin, on behalf of our Kentucky membership, get off your knees and get to work.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

ALG/DB:rdj
Enclosure

² Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity*, Public Religion Research Institute (Sept. 6, 2017), available at www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf.