

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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February 7, 2023

## SENT VIA U.S. MAIL

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders  
Arkansas Office of the Governor  
State Capitol Room 250  
500 Woodlane Avenue  
Little Rock, AR 72201

Re: Unconstitutional proselytizing and distribution of religious literature

Dear Governor Sanders:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding your recent visit to Wahl Elementary School. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members across the country, including members in Arkansas. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned complainant reported that on January 27, 2023, you visited Wahl Elementary School in your official capacity as governor. On your visit, you gave a reading of the religious children's book, "Why America Matters," and distributed copies of the book to elementary students. Please see the enclosed screenshots of posts discussing the visit from your official Twitter account.

The book "Why America Matters," written by Ben Carson, is Christian nationalist propaganda that promotes the ahistoric view that the Framers of the Constitution founded America on Judeo-Christian values.<sup>1</sup>

We write to request that in future you refrain from violating the Constitution by using your position as governor to promote your personal religious views and distribute religious literature to public school students.

As a government official, you are tasked with upholding the Constitution of the United States—including the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. By promoting a specific religious viewpoint and distributing religious books to public elementary school students, you do the opposite. You serve a religiously diverse state that consists not only of Christians and Jewish citizens, but also Muslim, atheist and other non-Christian constituents who do not subscribe to "Judeo-Christian values." When you promote specific religious views while acting in your official capacity as governor, you needlessly alienate your 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 this specific religious ideology over all others.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfTQSPfmZeQ&ab\\_channel=AmericanCornerstone](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfTQSPfmZeQ&ab_channel=AmericanCornerstone)

<sup>2</sup> 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/](http://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/).

Moreover, it is erroneous to assert that our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian values. The concept of “Judeo-Christian values” did not even exist until the mid 20th Century, let alone at the time the United States was founded.<sup>3</sup> To the contrary, the United States was founded by Enlightenment-inspired thinkers who valued reason and skepticism. If the Framers had wanted to establish the United States based on religious principles, they would have said so in the Constitution, the founding document of our nation. Instead they did the opposite. Our Founders made our country the first among nations to adopt a godless and entirely secular Constitution, one whose only references to religion are exclusionary (e.g., Article VI’s prohibition of any religious test as a qualification for public office).<sup>4</sup>

In reality, many of the Founders were particularly wary of forming a country that commingled religion with government. That is why they drafted a Constitution that effectively formed “a wall of separation between church and state.” In 1797, our country famously signed a treaty with Tripoli declaring that the “government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” This treaty—drafted during George Washington’s presidency, approved unanimously by the Senate, and signed by John Adams—is a reminder that the Founders explicitly held the United States to be a government that separated state from church. It is pure misinformation to suggest that our nation is founded on Judeo-Christian values. As Governor, you should strive to promote an accurate understanding of United States history that respects the foundational principles of the Constitution’s First Amendment. Elected officials are obligated to adhere to the Constitution, not Judeo-Christian values coupled with an erroneous recitation of national history.

We ask you to honor the Constitution you were elected to uphold and respect your Establishment Clause obligations. You were elected to lead the citizens of Arkansas, not to promote your own religion. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Samantha" being more prominent and the last name "Lawrence" following in a similar style.

Samantha F. Lawrence  
Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosures

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<sup>3</sup> James Loeffler, *The Problem with the “Judeo-Christian Tradition,”* THE ATLANTIC (Aug. 1, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/the-judeo-christian-tradition-is-over/614812/>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. CONST. art. VI, § 3.



**Sarah Huckabee Sanders** @SarahHuckabee · Jan 27

...

Arkansas is ready for bold education reforms that will improve childhood literacy, give our hardworking teachers a raise, expand broadband and empower parents so no child is trapped in a lifetime of poverty.

Great to visit J.F. Wahl Elementary School in Helena today!



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56.3K

