

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

September 30, 2021

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: (919) 733-6595

The Honorable Mark Robinson
Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina
20401 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

Re: Please resign over your shocking, inappropriate and dangerous Christian Nationalist remarks targeting non-Christians

Dear Lieutenant Governor Robinson:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our North Carolina membership to object to your recent troubling remarks suggesting that America is a Christian nation, that those who disagree should be deported, and that school shootings occur because of a lack of forced religion in our public schools. Given your intemperate, bigoted, unpatriotic and unAmerican remarks, it is clear you cannot fulfill the constitutional duties of your office and must resign.

FFRF is a nationwide educational nonprofit association with more than 35,000 nonreligious members across the country, including nearly 800 North Carolina members and a local chapter. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

It is our understanding that this past weekend at the North Carolina Faith & Freedom Coalition's "Salt & Light Conference," you made several disturbing statements expressing your desire for America to become a Christian theocracy, and urging that those who disagree with you must leave the country:¹

You can't continue to stand where God puts you without the God that puts you there. And so, we're going to continue to mention him. **As for this not being a Christian nation, yes, it is! If you don't like it, I'll buy your plane, train, or automobile ticket right up out of here.**

As long as there is a remnant of his people in this place that continue to pray to him and for his wisdom, **this will always be a Christian**

¹<https://www.newsweek.com/nc-lt-gov-mark-robinson-offers-deport-people-who-dislike-us-christian-nation-1634125>

nation. It was established by Him. When the founders said those words, when they wrote them down and declared them to the world and told them to a king that, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed” - by who? Their creator. Not the Congress, not the Senate, not the king, but by their creator - “with certain inalienable rights,” **God Almighty heard that and said, “There’s a nation I can get behind.” So, this is still a Christian nation, and we still give him thanks because he is still worthy and always will be.**

You then went on to blame school shootings on the decline of religion, and to advocate for forcing religion into our public schools:²

I’m tired of turning on my TV after a school shooting and watching folks come together on school grounds, where **they done told me I can’t pray, I can’t bring my Bible, can’t mention my God, can’t say nothing about Jesus Christ, but as soon as there’s a school shooting, everybody’s down at the schoolyard praying.** Now you done run him off your property, but as soon as there’s trouble, here you come, “We’re gonna have a prayer vigil down at the school because we had a shooting.” You know, it seems quite easy to me, sir, **if you had had that prayer vigil before that shooting, if you had let God come in that building before that shooting, if you had told those students, “Jesus Christ is the way and the light and only through him can you receive salvation,” there wouldn’t have been no school shooting.**

It’s too late now. Your little half-hearted attempts at soothing Jesus Christ, it’s not gonna work. **You done kicked God out of your school. Children don’t know whether they men or women, they’re murdering each other with impunity, and can’t read on a grade level, all because you done turned your back on the wisdom of the man that built that schoolhouse you in.**

Our nation is, sir, founded on a godless Constitution, whose only references to religion in government are exclusionary, such as “no religious test shall ever be required” for public office. U.S. Const. art. VI. The United States was the first nation to adopt a secular constitution, investing sovereignty in “We the People,” not a divine entity. In our nation, citizens can be any religion they like or none at all. Non-Christians and non-believers are not second-class citizens and our government and its representatives may not take sides on religious matters.

² *Id.*

You took an oath of office to uphold the secular U.S. Constitution. If you are unable to meet this basic requirement, you appear to be unfit to serve as an executive public official in our secular democracy. Imagine the fury, and rightly so, of Christians were an elected official to suggest we are an Islamic or atheist nation and that those who disagree should leave the country.

The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to our secular Constitution wisely prohibits the kind of Christian theocracy you are promoting. The Supreme Court has long held that the Establishment Clause “mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The Supreme Court has also stated, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that **no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion . . .**” *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (emphasis added). As an elected representative of the people, you violate both constitutional mandates when you suggest that all citizens must practice *your* religion or they should leave the country.

This country was *not* founded as a Christian nation, and no amount of repeating this misinformation will make it so. Rather, it was founded on Enlightenment values that often run directly counter to the Judeo-Christian values Christian nationalists claim to be our country’s foundation.³ It is the esteem in which we hold the principles of reason and equality that allows us to live in a peaceful society with people of all different walks of life united as Americans, not the ossified dogmatism stemming from the bible or the church.

The United States was first among nations to adopt a godless and entirely secular constitution, to place sovereignty not in a divinity but in “We, the People,” and to bar religious tests for public office. There was no prayer during the acrimonious, four-month-long constitutional convention that adopted our godless constitution, which showed intent. The Framers of the U.S. Constitution were aware of the centuries of warfare, schisms, bloodshed and persecution in the Old Countries where church and state (or church and monarch) were united, and of the continuing persecution and strife in most of the original colonies that established religion. Wanting no part of this, they purposefully and deliberately adopted the first secular constitution in history, a constitution that, because of that foresight, lives on to this day and has served our country so well.

This wise separation between religion and government embodied in the Establishment Clause has largely protected the United States from the religious

³ See generally ANDREW SEIDEL, *THE FOUNDING MYTH: WHY CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS UN-AMERICAN* (2019).

slaughter and persecution rife around the world and historically whenever the government and religion are aligned:

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.” *State ex rel. Weiss v. Dist. Bd. of Sch. Dist. No. 8 of City of Edgerton*, 76 Wis. 177, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890).

As lieutenant governor, your duty is to support the constitution and protect the right of North Carolinians to free exercise of religion, not to advocate for a Christian theocracy. Your continued promotion of religion is insulting and dangerous to non-religious and non-Christian citizens. Nonreligious Americans make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — 35 percent of Americans are non-Christians, most of them nonbelievers.⁴ More than one in four Americans now identify as religiously unaffiliated. The nonaffiliated, in fact, are now the largest demographic by “denomination.”⁵

Your suggestion that America is a Christian nation “sends the ancillary message to . . . nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*).

Furthermore, you ignorantly claim that the government must push religion onto a captive audience of school children and other Americans to stop school shootings. But the evidence does not bear this out. (Students are already free to pray privately, read the bible in their free time, and even attend Christian clubs in public schools. More than 65 years of compelling Supreme Court precedent correctly exists to protect the rights and freedom of conscience of children from school-sponsored and imposed prayers or indoctrination.)

Scientific studies⁶ show to the contrary of your claims that societies and states with less religion have less violence:

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

⁴ *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Oct. 17, 2019), available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 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.

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.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹ States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation have the highest rates of violent crime and murder.¹⁰

These studies do not prove that religion causes *all* of society's ills, but do reveal that Christianity and more religion 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."¹¹

By demanding that all citizens must follow *your* religion, by stigmatizing a minority viewpoint within our society, you have violated the rights of every citizen. Nonbelievers are police officers, firefighters, nurses, doctors, librarians, teachers, and students — and now even some members of state legislatures and Congress. They are part of your community and when you say they should be removed from

⁷ Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

⁸ Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted)

¹¹ 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>

the country — even offering to pay for their removal, it ostracizes and stigmatizes nonbelievers and non-Christians. We, as Americans, should be better than that. You, as a public leader, *must* be better than that. Your imposition of a religious litmus test for citizenship is barred by the very concept you would agree that we must hold so dear: religious freedom.

You were elected lieutenant governor, not preacher. Your oath of office has charged you with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not or do not share your personal religious viewpoints. You have shown that you are unfit for this responsibility. You owe an apology to all non-Christian and nonreligious Americans and you should resign.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents