

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

May 11, 2022

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND FAX: (208) 334-3259

The Honorable Janice McGeachin
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
State Capitol Building
700 W. Jefferson Street
Boise, Idaho 83702-0057

Re: Apologize for your menacing, unpatriotic and unAmerican remarks

Dear Ms. McGeachin:

On behalf of our 37,000 nonreligious members nationwide, including more than 180 in Idaho, our state/church watchdog is writing to condemn in strongest terms your frightening, threatening, ignorant, unpatriotic and unAmerican remarks in an interview circulated on May 9,¹ namely: “God calls us to pick up the sword and fight, and Christ will reign in the state of Idaho.”²

You took an oath of office to preserve and defend the U.S. Constitution, which is a godless and entirely secular document, the first in the world, in fact, to separate religion from government. Its only references to religion are exclusionary, such as that there shall be no religious test for public office. The framers of our Constitution were revolutionary in being first in history to invest sovereignty not in a divinity, but in “We the People.” The Bill of Rights starts with the First Amendment, barring any establishment of religion by the federal government, a prohibition that applies to the states under the 14th Amendment.

Further, the Idaho State Constitution prohibits any religious test or qualification to be a teacher or student, explicitly stating, “No sectarian or religious tenets or doctrines shall ever be taught in the public schools.” and prohibiting any legislative,

¹ Travis Gettys, *Trump-backed Idaho governor candidate vows “Christ will reign” if she’s elected*, Raw Story, May 9, 2022, available at www.rawstory.com/janice-mcgeachin-idaho/.

² *Id.*

county, city, town, school district or other public appropriations in aid of churches or sectarian institutions.³ Yet you maintain, “Christ will reign in the state of Idaho”!

Your message is antithetical to the entire founding of our secular nation, where freedom of conscience is to be honored and where the government is prohibited from favoring one religion over another, or religion over nonreligion.

Holding the second-highest executive office in your state, you are using your position of civil authority to threaten that “Christ will reign in the state of Idaho.” In an era of Christian nationalist and partisan strife, particularly following the insurrection of Jan. 6, 2021, which was partly instigated by Christian nationalist forces, as the report⁴ by FFRF and the Baptist Joint Committee thoroughly documents, it is impossible to read your words as anything other than a threat when you say “God calls us to pick up the sword and fight.”

As lieutenant governor, you do not represent Christian citizens, you represent all Idaho citizens of diverse religious and nonreligious views. PRRI’s Census of Religion, a definitive study, shows that almost every county in Idaho has at least a quarter of the population that is unaffiliated with religion. Forty-one percent of residents in Blaine County identify as religiously unaffiliated.⁵ On average, 67 percent of the state identifies with a Christian faith, 4 percent with non-Christian and 27 percent unaffiliated.⁶

Our nonreligious membership is well-acquainted with the bloodthirsty record of persecution brought about by a Christian union with governments and monarchs. As James Madison, the principal author of the Constitution, put it in his “Memorial and Remonstrance”⁷: “During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.” That is why the framers took assiduous care to separate religion from government.

³ Idaho State Constitution, Article IX, §§ 5–6.

⁴ Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection, by the Baptist Joint Committee and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, published Feb. 9, 2022, *available at* ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Christian_Nationalism_and_the_Jan6_Insurrection-2-9-22.pdf.

⁵ The 2020 Census of American Religion, PRRI, July 8, 2021, www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/.

⁶ Idaho Population 2022, worldpopulationreview.com/states/idaho-population.

⁷ James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance (1785), founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163.

Please retract your intemperate and menacing words immediately, and apologize to the many nonreligious and non-Christian citizens in your state. May we hear from you at your earliest convenience on what steps you are taking to mitigate your unfortunate pronouncement?

Very truly,

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