January 17, 2023

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Members of Congress:

On behalf of 30 religious, secular, and activist organizations and 10 religious and secular community leaders, and elected officials we are strongly encouraging you not to sponsor or attend the National Prayer Breakfast. The annual event takes place in the first week of February and is framed as a large bipartisan forum for political, social, and business leaders to gather and pray together, but the reality is different.

The National Prayer Breakfast is controversial and shrouded in secrecy. It has become a nexus for religious extremism, infiltration by Russian agents, and organized bigotry (anti-LGBTQ and anti-labor). The National Prayer Breakfast is an active marketplace of Christian nationalism, and it is not the bipartisan event that it purports to be.

Every year more members of Congress walk away from the event, including Representatives Pelosi, Khanna, Kirkpatrick, and Lieu. And each year more and more negative stories and well-sourced documentaries about the event continue to surface. The event is framed as a way for all Americans to come together through prayer during times of difficulty and division – but instead it invites division.

The Breakfast is a pay-to-play political event with a troubling history. Some of the serious issues associated with the event include:

- Anti-LGBTQ rhetoric is baked into the event, and it is a key driver in organizing the event. Recent stories have documented how foreign officials who join the event are inspired and further instructed to participate in virulently anti-LGBTQ campaigns. European LGBTQ groups like Forbidden Colours are objecting to this international influence.
- Mike Lindell credits his rise and relationship with former President Trump to being “picked out of 12 people to pray with Ben Carson in a room [at] the National Prayer Breakfast.”
- The FBI caught Maria Butina, an unregistered foreign agent with ties to Putin, using the event to illegally “back channel” with American officials who attended. Butina pleaded guilty and was convicted in 2018.
- New records reveal that Franklin Graham is the primary financial backer of the event, which he admitted is meant to buy access: “They’re wanting to be able to rub elbows with somebody that they normally couldn’t rub elbows
with.” Graham justified this by pointing to “the gays, they do everything they can to get their politicians into office.”

* Former President Trump used the event in 2019 to promote discriminatory adoption practices: “My administration is working to insure that faith-based adoption agencies are able to help vulnerable children find their forever families while following their deeply held beliefs.” And his comments were met with tremendous enthusiasm.

* The National Prayer Breakfast is run by the opaque Fellowship Foundation. The organization has had troubling relationships with dictators around the world such as Gen. Suharto of Indonesia, Siad Barre of Somalia, Jonas Savimbi of Angola, Artur da Costa e Silva of Brazil, Papa Doc Duvalier of Haiti and other authoritarian leaders, such as Vladimir Putin of Russia.

* The Fellowship Foundation was originally founded to oppose the New Deal and crush organized labor.

* The bipartisan framing of the event is, at best, insincere. One former member of the organizer admitted to a writer, “we had more influence as long as we can keep a couple Democrats in the fold.”

Members of Congress who sponsor or attend the event are inadvertently sending a message that their office endorses the event’s Christian nationalist message, which is incompatible with pluralistic religious freedom and our constitutional system of governance. Moreover, besides the issue of religious freedom, supporting the breakfast would be a blatant disregard for some of the most vulnerable communities in our country today given the event’s support for anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns.

We understand that Congressional representatives want to engage their constituents in a variety of venues. However, history has proven that this event is an attempt to bait members of Congress into inadvertently supporting Christian nationalist ideals, extremism, and bigotry. We respectfully ask you to decline any invitation to attend or sponsor the National Prayer Breakfast.

Sincerely,
American Atheists
American Humanist Association
All Souls Movement
Association of Secular Elected Officials
Auburn Theological Seminary
Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative
Black Nonbelievers
Camp Quest
Campus Pride
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Inquiry
The Clergy Project
Columbia Atheists (Columbia, MO)
Council for Global Equality
Cultural and Secular Jewish Organization
Delaware Association for Humanism
DignityUSA
Fòs Feminista
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Freethought Society
The Global Justice Institute
God Can Ministries UCC
Humanists of Long Island
Lambda Legal
MPact Global Action for Gay Health & Rights
Praise House Anti-Racism Institute, Inc.
Secular Coalition for America
Secular Student Alliance
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Transgender Law Center

Community Leaders:
Rep. Sherry Dutzy, New Hampshire
Hon. Stephen Patrick Driscoll, Pembroke, Massachusetts - Member of the Executive Committee, Massachusetts Democratic State Committee
Rev. Lori Hlaban, Beaufort, South Carolina
Rep. Lois Galgay Reckitt, Maine
Rev. Dr. Marilyn Pagán-Banks, Chicago, Illinois
Sen. Kelda Roys, Wisconsin
Rev. Christopher H. Schaeffer, Pomfret, New York - Councilperson
Roy Speckhardt, Washington, DC - President, The Humanist Foundation
Rep. Brianna Titone, Colorado
Rep. Lynne Williams, Maine