

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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July 7, 2020

SENT VIA FAX ONLY:

(202) 225-9692

The Honorable Roger Williams
1708 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Government promotion of religion

Dear Representative Williams:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to constitutional concerns regarding religious promotion through your emails with constituents. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization with more than 32,000 members throughout the country, including over 1,300 in Texas and many in your district. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

A concerned constituent from Texas's 25th Congressional District contacted us to report that your office recently sent an email to constituents urging a them to adopt faith as a central facet of their lives while stressing that "[o]ur nation was founded on Judeo-Christian values," and that "we must provide our children and grandchildren with the proper direction, allowing them to walk by faith and not by fear."

We write to request that you refrain from promoting Christianity or religion through your official government communications. When a government official who has taken an oath to defend our godless and entirely secular Constitution uses his elected office to promote personal religious beliefs, as you have done here, he violates the spirit of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The First Amendment wisely prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. 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 admonish your constituents to practice *your* religion through the platform granted by your office.

Further, this country was *not* founded on Judeo-Christian values, 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 you claim to be our country’s foundation.¹ 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.

Government officials may worship, pray, and participate in religious events in their personal capacities. But they may not provide credibility or prestige to their religion by using their government office and government title to promote it. The office and title belong to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant.

We request that you refrain from using your office as a medium through which to espouse your personal religious beliefs and that you work to uphold the cherished separation of state and church enshrined in our secular Constitution. Please inform us in writing of the steps you take to address this matter. We hope this letter finds you in good health.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker
Co-Presidents
Freedom From Religion Foundation

¹ See generally ANDREW SEIDEL, *THE FOUNDING MYTH: WHY CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS UN-AMERICAN* (2019).