

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 22, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Unconstitutional use of government office to advance personal religion

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to once again object to your use of the office of Secretary of State to advance your personal religious beliefs. FFRF is a national nonprofit with more than 32,000 members across the United States. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional separation of state and church and to educate the public about matters relating to nontheism.

We have received numerous complaints from our members regarding your speech on September 20, 2020 at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas urging Christians to display and practice their faith in the public square.¹ We understand that you took this opportunity to promote your personal religious beliefs while acting in your official capacity,² as well as to spread misinformation about the founding principles of our nation.

The Supreme Court has long held that government officials may not promote or endorse religion in their official capacities, noting that the “First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *see also Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The Supreme Court has further ruled that “[t]he Establishment Clause, at the very least, prohibits government from appearing to take a position on questions of religious belief.” *Cnty. of Allegheny v. Am. Civil Liberties Union Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573, 593–94 (1989). One could hardly violate these mandates in a more obvious manner than you did, expressing a clear

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TtrnQ_hb0o.

² *Id.* (“Faith in the public square is not only lawful, but righteous. It’s not only powerful, but required of each of us.”; “Every interaction you have, bring the lord with you.”; Faith is “the center of our nation[.]”)

preference for a specific set of religious beliefs, publicly admonishing Americans to exercise those same religious beliefs, and claiming that it is “[w]hat we are meant to be as Americans.”

You appear to have some understanding of this core constitutional principle, as indicated by one of the few agreeable statements in your speech: “In our country, it’s true, you’re free to have no faith at all, and our nation doesn’t establish a state religion. That seems right. That’s what our founders contemplated.” There is, however, an enormous gap between your actions and the spirit of this bedrock principle of our republic. Surely, when someone with the power of “America’s most senior diplomat” states that he “fundamentally believe[s] that connecting one’s faith with America’s foreign policy is essential,” as well as indicating a clear intention to spread his faith through his work, he wields the power of the government to spread—and therefore, to establish—religion.

Finally, your speech evinced a painfully misguided understanding of the history of our nation’s founding. The central claim of Christian nationalism is the one you repeated in your speech: that the United States is founded on Judeo-Christian principles. And it is fundamentally wrong. More often than not, Judeo-Christian principles conflict with America’s founding principles in irreconcilable ways.³ One would be hard pressed to name a single principle that is unique and original to Judeo-Christianity that positively influenced American law and government.

In closing, we once again urge you to cease your relentless abuse of the power granted to you by the American people in order to forward your personal religious goals.

Very truly,

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

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

³ See generally Andrew Seidel, *The Founding Myth* (2019).