

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

August 14, 2020

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL:

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
State of Louisiana
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Religious endorsement on social media

Dear Senator Cassidy:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to citizen concerns over religious promotion on your official government Facebook page. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 32,000 members across the country, including many members in Louisiana. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned Louisiana resident contacted FFRF to report that every Sunday bible verses are posted to your official government Facebook page. Please see the enclosed screenshots.

We write to request that you refrain from posting messages that proselytize or endorse religion on your official government social media accounts. When a government official uses his elected office, including governmental platforms such as an official Facebook page, to promote his personal religious beliefs, he violates the spirit of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The First Amendment 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). Your office violates this constitutional mandate when it proselytizes the Christian faith to all constituents, such as directing them to “Trust in the LORD.”

As a senator, you represent a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also minority religious and nonreligious citizens. Religious endorsements made in your official capacity send a message that excludes the 35 percent of Americans who are not Christian, which

includes the 26 percent who identify as nonreligious.¹ These messages needlessly alienate the non-Christian and nonreligious citizens you represent, turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

It would be entirely possible, of course, for you to send uplifting and motivational messages to your constituents without ostracizing a significant portion of those you represent. By couching your sentiments in exclusively religious terms, and by quoting exclusively from one religion's holy book, you unnecessarily exclude a significant portion of the community. Regardless of your intent, this social media post sends the message to your minority religious and nonreligious constituents that their participation in the political process is less valued than that of their Christian counterparts.

The Supreme Court recently described the power of social media sites as “the principal sources for knowing current events, checking ads for employment, speaking and listening in the modern public square, and otherwise exploring the vast realms of human thought and knowledge.” *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 137 S. Ct. 1730, 1737 (2017) (internal quotations omitted). Government officials and entities must be particularly diligent not to entangle religious messages with official government pronouncements made in this important modern medium. In your private life and capacity, of course, you can freely express your religious views as much as you like, however you like.

We request that you remove all religious posts from your official government Facebook page and avoid making similar posts in the future. Please inform us in writing of the steps you take to address this issue. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and we hope this letter finds you in good health.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

ALG/DB: bcj

Enclosure

¹ *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/>.



U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy ✓

2d · 🌐



"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

- Proverbs 3: 5-6

526

226 Comments 31 Shares

Like

Comment

Share



U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy ✓

July 19 · 🌐



"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

- Psalm 42:11

546

353 Comments 25 Shares

Like

Comment

Share



U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy ✓

July 12 · 🌐



"The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him."

- Psalm 28:7

625

321 Comments 32 Shares

Like

Comment

Share