

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

July 13, 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: weigand.jeff@countyofdane.com

Jeff Weigand
Supervisor, Dane County Board
210 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd #114
Madison WI 53703

Re: Apologize for intemperate and insulting remarks about nonbelievers

Dear Supervisor:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which works to educate the public about nontheism and to defend the constitutional separation between state in church, in response to your recent intemperate and bigoted remarks against nonbelievers. FFRF has more than 40,000 members nationwide and hundreds in Dane County. We are demanding an apology from you to nonreligious Dane County residents. As Dane County supervisor, you serve not just Christians and believers but all Dane County residents, nearly half of whom identify as having no religion, who were impugned by your ill-considered remarks.¹

We take umbrage at your unprovoked and gratuitous attacks on “anti-God people.” You stated publicly² that “I think unfortunately... there's a lot of people that resent God, and they're trying to stick their nose and just stick their finger in His face. And they're doing things that they know are wrong. And it's in direct opposition to Him, which is really unfortunate.”

Your diatribe was in the context of condemning a naked bike ride event that was not organized or had any connection with nonbelieving groups or “anti-God people,” making your rant all the more offensive. You used this unrelated event to vent spleen against people who do not believe in a god, even conflating nonbelief with threats to children: “We need to protect our children. Our fundamental role as a governmental entity is to punish evil and reward good. And when people don't see that happening, they get frustrated. And I

¹ The American religious Landscape in 2020, PRRI, July 8, 2021:
<https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>

² Wisconsin official fumes at naked climate change protest, Fox News, July 13, 2023
<https://www.foxnews.com/media/wisconsin-official-fumes-nude-bike-ride-protest-allowing-young-girl-join-enough-is-enough>

think that's what we're seeing all across the country.” (Regarding concern for children, I couldn't help but wonder as a Christian where your rant is against the Roman Catholic Church for decades of scandals relating to cover-up of abuse of upwards of hundreds of thousands of children by priests and other Catholic officials. So much for protecting children.)

In terms of your remarks regarding the role of our government, its purpose is not to stand-in per se for some vengeful deity to “punish evil and reward good.” The role of government, as established in the preamble of our godless and entirely secular U.S. Constitution, is “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

General welfare, justice, domestic tranquility and the blessings of liberty are not served when local elected officials scapegoat or target a segment of the population based solely on their views about religion. Such an attack is demeaning, undeserved and profoundly unAmerican.

Despite the resurgence of Christian nationalism across our nation, citizens are still accorded equal treatment under the law and the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of conscience. In short, citizens are free to believe or disbelieve and the government is not free to take sides. As Thomas Jefferson put it, “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”³ We ask that you apologize, and take care in the future to avoid defaming the character of the 40 percent of Dane County residents who identify as atheists, agnostics or nothing in particular.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President, Freedom From Religion Foundation

³ Extract from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782:
<https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2260>