



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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April 27, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

Re: Department of State Must Cancel National Day of Prayer Event

Dear Ms. Secretary:

On behalf of our national membership, we are asking you to cancel the Department of State National Day of Prayer event scheduled for May 6. In light of the federal court decision on April 15 striking down the National Day of Prayer as unconstitutional, it is essential that the Department of State distance itself from such an inappropriate entanglement with religion and specifically with Christianity. The Freedom From Religion Foundation (“FFRF”) is a national nonprofit educational organization with more than 14,500 members across the country. FFRF works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that the Department of State is scheduled to sponsor a National Day of Prayer Task Force event for its federal employees. The official website for the National Day of Prayer Task Force advertises that your event will be held at the Department of State on May 6, 2010, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and that it is “only open to State Dept employees.”

We respectfully request that you take immediate steps to ensure that no Department of State officials or employees organize, promote or participate in a National Day of Prayer event in their official capacity. Official government participation in religious ritual and proselytizing activities violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The National Day of Prayer is the creation of evangelical Christian lobbies and their Congressional supporters. Rev. Billy Graham proposed the annual Presidential Proclamation in 1952 in order to promote “the Lord Jesus Christ” across the land. Evangelical groups lobbied in 1988 to make the National Day of Prayer a fixed date to better promote events tying together government and religion, specifically evangelical Christianity. Subsequently, the National Day of Prayer Task Force was created to “communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, mobilizing the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership.” The National Day of Prayer has no secular meaning or purpose.

In *Freedom From Religion Foundation v. Obama*, No. 08-588, 2010 WL 1499451 (W.D. Wis. 2010), Judge Crabb struck down the National Day of Prayer statute and enjoined the

President and his press secretary from issuing an annual proclamation. The District Court found that the “sole purpose [of the National Day of Prayer] is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context. In this instance, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to the individual conscience.” *FFRF v. Obama*, 2010 WL 1499451, at *2. By sponsoring a National Day of Prayer event, the Department of State unconstitutionally endorses a religious message (which, since the inception of the National Day of Prayer, has always been a Christian message).

No Department of State official can officially support or promote the National Day of Prayer, “any more than the government may encourage citizens to fast during the month of Ramadan, attend a synagogue, purify themselves in a sweat lodge or practice rune magic. In fact, it is because the nature of prayer is so personal and can have such a powerful effect on a community that the government may not use its authority to try to influence an individual's decision whether and when to pray.” *Id.*


Official sponsorship of the National Day of Prayer event inappropriately excludes nonbelievers and alienates non-Christians. Department of State officials take an oath of office to uphold the entirely secular and godless Constitution, whose only references to religion are exclusionary (such as that there can be no religious test for public office). As Secretary of State, you should send a clear signal that you will uphold that oath by supporting and defending the Constitution and resisting requests to promote religion and prayer.

At least 15% of the American population is nonreligious (American Religious Identification Survey 2008). The message from the Department of State becomes, “‘Americans’ pray; if you do not believe in the power of prayer, you are not a true American.” *Id.* at *14. Official support for a National Day of Prayer sends the impermissible message to nonreligious employees and to nonreligious Americans that they are political outsiders.

Ironically, at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast on February 4, 2010, you said, “So in the Obama Administration, we are working to bridge religious divides.” We request that you practice what you preach. Nothing is more divisive or inappropriate than religion in government. We urge you to end Department of State sponsorship of religious events. Department of State support of the National Day of Prayer is alarming and inappropriate on multiple levels.

May we hear from you at your earliest convenience?

Very truly,


Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-Presidents

