

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

March 13, 2012

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL
(405) 962-7605

The Honorable Kris Steele
Speaker
Oklahoma House of Representatives
2300 N Lincoln Blvd
Oklahoma City OK 73105

Re: Weekly Devotionals and Opening Prayers at House Sessions

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We write on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (“FFRF”) and our Oklahoma members who object to the practice of starting House sessions with prayer and the inclusion of Thursday weekly devotionals. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing over 17,500 members across the country, including over 100 members in Oklahoma. We also have an active chapter based in Tulsa. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

On behalf of our Oklahoma membership, we urge you to discontinue the practice of scheduling prayers to open House of Representative (“House”) sessions and permitting the “Chaplain of the Week” remarks to the House. Removing official prayers and weekly devotionals from official sessions is the only way to ensure that the House is in compliance with the Constitution.

It is our information and understanding that the House opens its sessions with prayer. We further understand that each week on Thursday a “Chaplain of the Week” is invited to deliver remarks to the House. These remarks are referred to as the “weekly devotional.”

We further understand that prayers are mostly delivered by Christian clergy and are typically sectarian in nature often ending “In Jesus’ name.” Most recently, on March 1, 2012, Pastor Bill Ledbetter of Fairview Baptist Church offended many with his sectarian devotional and prayer. During his remarks, which sounded more like a sermon than an address to elected officials, he brought up several hot button issues including intelligent design, same sex marriage and abortion. Pastor Ledbetter also quoted scripture extensively and frequently shouted “Hallelujah!” He professed that Jesus Christ died for

our sins and those who do not believe in Jesus will go to hell. During his diatribe he berated the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and blamed secularism for natural disasters such as Katrina and the recent earthquake on the east coast.

Some of his troubling "remarks" are as follows (a full transcription is enclosed):

"God is good, he's a giver of good things and he is the giver of every perfect thing. And do you know what, the most perfect thing that God has given to us is his son, Jesus Christ."

"...God has an eraser and that eraser is in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and he rose from the dead and there on that cross he shed his blood for you and me. That if we would turn from our sins and place our faith in Jesus we might go to Heaven when we die. And friend let me tell you something; I want to go to Heaven when I die. I don't want to go to Hell."

"He gave even his son Jesus Christ for us. If a person chooses to go that other direction that's where they're going to wind up and that is their choice. God is good."

"That's Intelligent Design and God the Father made it that way. Hallelujah!"

"And so we have used the separation now as a crowbar to throw God and Christ and the word of God out of the center of this country. And though we know he's the creator - we know he's God - we no longer honor him as God. We want to be secular; so we've thrown him out. Consequently, when you do that, you cannot create law that corresponds with his word and brings his favor."

"And now, all across our nation, kids are taught that they are advanced mutations of a baboon. They are taught that they came from a monkey. Let me tell you something, evolution is not science and I know that's not politically correct. But what it is, is an indoctrination to teach a godless worldview. And it defies our founding documents; our forefathers talked about the Creator in the Declaration of Independence. Read it. Hallelujah!"

"I'm concerned that God is speaking to us. When's the last time you've heard of an earthquake hitting Washington D.C. and cracking the Washington monument? And simultaneously a hurricane goes up the through the eastern seaboard and floods New York City then wipes out great portions of Vermont so that whole cities are not even connected anymore by roads."

"And let me tell you something, it's no coincidence that Katrina came on board the day before [Southern Decadence] began in New Orleans, Louisiana. I promise you God is sovereign."

“A reprobate mind says this: that it’s ok for a man to marry a man; a woman to marry a woman. Folks that’s not enlightenment, that’s spiritual darkness. And if we think that we’re going to make same-sex marriage a civil right and God’s going to wink about that and say well God bless America, I would invite us to think again. He’s never done it and I don’t believe he ever will. Listen, righteousness exalts a nation.”

“This body has begun to take some courageous steps and I applaud you. And we need you; do the right thing. We need to overturn the shedding of innocent blood of this land. Fifty million babies; you know where they all are? All those babies on the crystal sea before God. I can see ‘em out there on the sea; couchie-coo. And look at God the Father; aaah. If you shed innocent blood, as we have for fifty years, there’s no nation that has ever survived that, beloved.”

“But you know I believe God is at work in America and we must turn this thing around. Do you? Do you believe that? We must turn it around. And here’s the good news, God said this, “Return to me, and I’ll return to you.” Hallelujah. God said this, “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear their prayer from Heaven, and I will answer them, and I’ll heal their land.” And we must have people in office and put people in office who will make law that corresponds with the word of God and the will of God. Not political correctness. Not tolerance; it always brews intolerance. That’s the good news.”

Then, after his “remarks” concluded, you, as Speaker of the House requested before the prayer began, “Members would you please stand and guests in the gallery, would you please stand as you are able.” Pastor Ledbetter then led the members and the guests in the gallery in prayer:

“Thank you members of the House. Our Father, today we humble ourselves before you. We are grateful that still you are at work in America in so many areas. Father, we are thankful for every American, every single American and we desire to bless them Father, but more than anything today, we desire to honor you, Father, in all that we do, so that we can in fact bless our people. Give this body of men and women great courage and strength and especially, I pray the angel of the Lord encamp around about them and their families and Father, protect them. I pray your majesty with respect and hope that I have been pleasing to you, Father, In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

First and foremost, prayer at government meetings is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. Calling upon Oklahoma House members and citizens to rise and pray is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular state government. House members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They do not need to worship on taxpayers’ time. The House ought not to lend its power and prestige to religion, amounting to a governmental endorsement that excludes the 11%

of the Oklahoman population that is nonreligious and the 13% of the Oklahoman population that is not Christian (American Religious Identification Survey 2008).

The House compounds the violation when a majority of the prayers are to Jesus and/or a majority of the officiants are Christian or Christian clergy. Such prayer creates acrimony, makes religious minorities feel like political outsiders in their own community, and shows unconstitutional governmental preference not just for religion over non-religion, but Christianity over other faiths.

Sectarian Prayers

The prayers being offered before the House's meetings do not fall into the narrow exception of the constitutionally permissible government-sponsored prayer laid out by the Supreme Court. In *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983), the Supreme Court ruled that the Nebraska legislature's history and tradition of opening with a prayer was a constitutional exception. The Court found government prayer, in this case, was confined to a situation involving a non-sectarian, non-denominational prayer, led by an officiant who had not been selected based upon any impermissible religious motive, and which was addressed to the body of legislators present and no one else. *See Marsh*, 463 U.S. 783. Additionally, the Court held that legislators must have the option not to participate. The prayer opportunity must not be "exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other faith or belief." 463 U.S. at 794-795. The Court expressly noted that the content of the prayers was permissible because the chaplain had "removed all references to Christ." *Id.* at 793 n.14.

Even if the House has had an established history of opening its meetings with prayer, the House's practice still violates the Establishment Clause because of its sectarian nature. In *County of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573, 603 (1989), the Supreme Court found that, even if history and custom had saved non-sectarian legislative prayer, "history cannot legitimate practices that demonstrate the government's allegiance to a particular sect or creed." Additionally, the Court reiterated, "not even the 'unique history' of legislative prayer, can justify contemporary legislative prayers that have the effect of affiliating the government with any one specific faith or belief." *Id.* The Court continued, "The legislative prayers involved in *Marsh* did not violate this principle because the particular chaplain had 'removed all references to Christ.' " *Id.*

Lower federal courts have continued to emphasize that some government-sponsored prayers are constitutionally permissible only because they are non-sectarian, non-denominational and do not invoke a particular faith or deity. *See, e.g., Turner v. Fredericksburg*, 534 F.3d 292 (4th Cir. 2004), cert. denied, 2009 WL 56225 (U.S.)(No. 08-518)(finding constitutional a city council policy prohibiting sectarian prayers); *Wynne v. Town of Great Falls*, 376 F.3d 292 (4th Cir. 2004)(holding that the Establishment Clause was violated when the town council opened sessions with prayer containing references to Jesus Christ); *Bacus v. Palo Verde Unified School District*, 52 Fed.Appx. 355 (9th Cir. 2002)(unpublished)("These prayers advanced one faith, Christianity, providing it with a special endorsed and privileged status in the school board. Some

religions accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, some do not, and some people do not believe in any religious faith. Solemnizing school board meetings ‘in the Name of Jesus’ displays ‘the government’s allegiance to a particular sect or creed.’ ”).

Just recently, in 2011, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that prayers to Jesus during Forsyth County Commissioners meetings were unconstitutional. *Joyner v. Forsyth County, N.C.*, 653 F.3d 341, 349 (4th Cir. 2011), *cert. denied* No. 10-1232 (U.S. January 13, 2012). The Court said, “Faith is as deeply important as it is deeply personal, and the government should not appear to suggest that some faiths have it wrong and others got it right.” *Id.* at 349. The Court explained:

To be sure, citizens in a robust democracy should expect to hear all manner of things that they do not like. But the First Amendment teaches that religious faith stands on a different footing from other forms of speech and observance. Because religious belief is so intimate and so central to our being, government advancement and effective endorsement of one faith carries a particular sting for citizens who hold devoutly to another. This is precisely the opposite of what legislative invocations should bring about. In other words, whatever the Board’s intentions, its policy, as implemented, has led to exactly the kind of ‘divisiveness the Establishment Clause seeks rightly to avoid.’ *Id.* at 354-355 (quoting *Simpson v. Chesterfield County Bd. of Supr’s*, 404 F.3d 276, 284 (4th Cir. 2005).

The Fourth Circuit’s reasoning in another prayer at government meetings case, *Wynne*, is particularly helpful in understanding the boundaries for prayer at government meetings drawn in *Marsh*. In *Wynne*, the court held that any sectarian invocations of deities in legislative prayer serve to affiliate the government with a particular sect or creed and/or advance a particular faith or belief. *See Wynne*, 376 F.3d at 302. Additionally, both the presence and participation of town citizens were crucial to the court’s determination that the Town Council had attempted to advance the Christian faith. *See id.* at 301. Ultimately, the court concluded:

“*Marsh* does not permit legislators to ... engage, as part of public business and for the citizenry as a whole, in prayers that contain explicit references to a deity in whose divinity only those of one faith believe. *The invocations at issue here, which specifically call upon Jesus Christ, are simply not constitutionally acceptable legislative prayer like that approved in Marsh. Rather they embody the precise kind of “advancement” of that Marsh cautioned against.*” *Id.* (emphasis added).

The prayers currently invoked at House meetings impermissibly advance Christianity and lead a reasonable observer to believe that the House is endorsing not only religion over non-religion, but also Christianity over other faiths. This practice inappropriately alienates non-Christians and non-believers. Their efforts to participate in public meetings are adversely affected by these types of prayers, which turn non-believers and non-Christians into political outsiders of their own community and government.

Weekly Devotionals

The inclusion of “weekly devotionals” is outrageous and clearly crosses the line of separation between state and church. This practice goes far beyond the limited exception found in *Marsh* that allows non-sectarian prayers. Permitting the “Chaplain of the Week” at least five minutes of floor time once a week to offer a “devotional” demonstrates government endorsement of religion. Moreover, this practice turns the House session into a worship service as demonstrated by the “remarks” given to the House during the month of March thus far. These “remarks” contained frequent quotes from scripture and included biblical stories and teachings. Pastor Ledbetter’s often political “remarks” were intended to proselytize not only the legislators in attendance, but also the Oklahoman citizens who were visiting the state capitol and those viewing the proceedings online.

“The Establishment Clause assures that the government will not favor a particular religion, nor religion over nonreligion.” *Snyder v. Murray Corp.*, 123 F.3d 1349, 1353 (10th Cir. 1997). In fact, the Establishment Clause exists precisely to limit government actions relating to religion and to maintain governmental neutrality on the subject of religion. As the Supreme Court has said, “The defining principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence is that the ‘First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.’” *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005) (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968)). No government official has the “right” to abuse his or her governmental office, power or position by scheduling weekly sectarian devotionals to be delivered at official House sessions.

Of course, private citizens, including governmental officials in their *personal capacities*, are free to practice their religion. That liberty is strengthened, rather than weakened, by keeping government out of the business of religion.

Finally, any assertion that these “remarks” are intended to simply solemnize the session is negated by Pastor Ledbetter’s obvious proselytizing and political diatribe. Pastor Ledbetter abused the privilege to address House members to discuss his own personal religious and political views, not to mention to mislead House members and guests by misinforming them of the founders’ intentions and perpetuating the myth that America is a Christian nation. That you, as Speaker, allowed this diatribe to continue beyond five minutes only strengthens the observation that the House endorses Pastor Ledbetter’s religious *and* political messages.

U.S. Founded on Separation of State/Church

America was founded in part by refugees seeking freedom from government dictation of religion. These refugees wanted freedom from a government telling them which church to support, what religious rituals to engage in, or what to believe or disbelieve. The U.S. founders who adopted our entirely secular Constitution knew there can be no religious liberty without the freedom to dissent. Whether to pray, whether to believe in a god who

answers prayer, is an intensely precious and personal decision protected under our First Amendment as a paramount matter of conscience. It is also important to note that the founders did not pray at the Constitutional Convention, which shows intent.

Our nation is founded on a godless Constitution, whose only references to religion in government are exclusionary, such as that there shall be no religious test for public office (U.S. Const. art. VI). The United States was first among nations to adopt a secular constitution, investing sovereignty in “We the People,” not a divinity. Our founders were aware that “[t]orrents of blood have been spilt in the old world” when religion and government were united. (James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance, 1785). Madison added, “During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.”

Religion had been an intensely divisive issue in the original Thirteen Colonies, where religious intolerance was endemic, and citizens might lose civil rights, be banished, jailed or in some instances executed, for holding a religious conviction contrary to that of the government. Today the religious right often touts the pre-Constitutional actions of the Continental Congress that adopted the weak Articles of Confederation, and that failed to include safeguards separating government from religion. The religious right often conflates the short-lived 8-year Articles with the enduring Constitution that replaced it. Yet even at the inaugural session of that Continental Congress in 1774, when a delegate proposed to open a session with prayer, both John Jay and John Rutledge (two future Chief Justices of the Supreme Court) objected, saying Congress was “so divided in religious Sentiments . . . that We could not join in the same Act of Worship.”

It is significant that after the catastrophic experiences with the Articles, our founders ensured there was no prayer at the Constitutional Convention, which convened in 1787 to write the U.S. Constitution. See Leo Pfeffer, *Church State and Freedom*, 121-122 (Beacon Press, 1967).

Significantly, President Thomas Jefferson, recognizing of the intrinsic problems when religion and government mix, actively opposed government sponsorship of prayer:

I consider the government of the U.S. as interdicted by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises ... I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting & prayer are religious exercises. The enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, & the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the constitution has deposited it.

(Jefferson’s letter to Rev. Samuel Miller, 1808).

Likewise, James Madison, the primary architect of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, and our second president, ultimately opposed government prayers and congressional chaplaincies. See Andy G. Olree, *James Madison and Legislative Chaplains*, 102 Northwestern L. Rev. 145 (2008). In his *Detached Memoranda*, Madison criticized the chaplaincies and the idea that “religious truth is to be tested by numbers or that the major sects have a right to govern the minor.”

Solution is to Discontinue Prayer and Weekly Devotionals

Citizens electing to attend or participate in government meetings such as the House’s public sessions and Representatives working in the state legislature should not be subjected to Christian-based, or even non-denominational prayer much less weekly devotionals. By hosting prayers and devotionals, which inevitably show preference for Christianity, the House is illegally and inappropriately imposing its religious beliefs on its own members and Oklahomans in attendance.

Moreover, these types of government prayers and religious rituals not only conflict with the Constitution, but also with biblical teachings. Christians who know their bible are familiar with the biblical injunction of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemning as hypocrisy public prayer. “Enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.” (Matthew 6:5-13).

To avoid the constitutional concerns these prayers cause for the House and the divisiveness these prayers cause within the community the solution is simple: discontinue official, government prayers before legislative meetings. We request a prompt response in writing about what steps you are taking to respect the Establishment Clause and remedy these constitutional violations.

Sincerely,

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

Dan Barker

Enclosure

March 1, 2012

Speaker of the House, Kris Steele:

We have serving as our Chaplain this week, Pastor Bill Ledbetter of Fairview Baptist Church in Durant, Oklahoma. Pastor Ledbetter is being sponsored this week by Representative George Faught. At this time I would like to ask Pastor Ledbetter to come forward and lead us in our weekly devotional followed by our morning invocation. (...)

Pastor Ledbetter:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you members of the House. I want to thank you for what you're doing here to have a Pastor of the week. Thank you so much. That's a stand and I appreciate you for that and I doubly want to thank you for allowing me to come and be with you this week. I want to begin by telling you that I love America and that I love Oklahoma and my family in Durant and my church family and I, we love you and we pray for you and we appreciate you and can I tell you that we need you desperately in this time. Thank you for your service.

Three great attributes of almighty God from one verse - James Chapter 1 Verse 17 – the Bible says this “every good thing bestowed. Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” James talks about three characteristics of God there, first of all, God is good, hallelujah. Through and through and through, and he is the giver of every good thing like hot buttered popcorn, ice cold tea, freshly laundered towels, a beautiful sunset, a good horse. My riding buddy he says that the outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man and you know what, he's right. God is good, he's a giver of good things and he is the giver of every perfect thing. And do you know what, the most perfect thing that God has given to us is his son, Jesus Christ.

Do you know who the smartest man in the world is? The smartest man in the world is that guy that invented the eraser you put on top of a pencil. You know why? Because he knew that people are sinners. And being sinners, we make mistakes. We do things wrong and we need some grace. We need an opportunity to erase that, start over, and get the right answer. Do you know that God has an eraser? It's like the little girl who was out with her daddy and watching at an air show where an airplane using smoke wrote something across the sky. And then, after a little bit, that writing began to dissipate in the wind of the atmosphere, and the little girl looked at daddy and she said “look daddy, God has an eraser.” And I'm gonna tell you something, that God has an eraser and that eraser is in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and he rose from the dead and there on that cross he shed his blood for you and me. That if we would turn from our sins and place our faith in Jesus we might go to Heaven when we die. And friend let me tell you something, I want to go to Heaven when I die. I don't want to go to Hell.

People always ask me, “Well, Brother Bill, how could a loving God send someone to Hell?” Friend, listen to me, he doesn’t, he’s done everything he can to keep you out of Hell. He gave even his son Jesus Christ for us. If a person chooses to go that other direction that’s where they’re going to wind up and that is their choice. God is good. He’s also the Father of lights and I don’t know if you realize where you’re sitting and you say “well yes, I do. I’m in the House of Representatives” but really you’re sitting on a rock. And this rock is traveling through space at 67,000 miles per hour. It’s spinning around at a thousand miles per hour and scientists tell us that if the earth spun at 500 miles per hour, we’d freeze to death on one side and burn up on the other. But it spins at exactly 1,000 miles per hour every single day. The earth is ninety-three million miles from the sun. The speed of light traveling at 186,000 miles per second; that means that the light you see out there left at a little over eight minutes ago to get here. And it comes through space in a ray, you can’t see that light in space, but it comes like a ray and then hits this magnificent atmosphere and is diffused all around the earth so that we have something called day. And let me tell you something, that didn’t happen by random chance. That’s Intelligent Design and God the Father made it that way. Hallelujah! He’s the Father of lights. But then James says there’s no variation or shifting shadow with God. God has not changed. He described himself in Malachi 3:6 where he says, “I the Lord do not change.”

Would you bear with me for a moment? America is the only nation in history that’s been under one governing document her whole history. The second greatest document ever crafted, second only to the Bible, is the Constitution on the United States of America. And some political scientists try and understand where our forefathers got that kind of wisdom to create such an incredible, breathing living document as the Constitution. And they discovered that 34% of the time, as our forefathers crafted the Constitution, they were quoting the Bible. They discovered that little over 8% of the time they were quoting Baron Charles de Montesquieu. They discovered that about 7% of the time they were quoting William Blackstone and 2.5% they were quoting John Locke. And the interesting thing when they got all the writings isolated - got to down to the bottom of it – every time they were building the underpinnings of our Constitution they were either quoting the Bible or quoting someone else who was quoting the Bible. And Patrick Henry wanted us to understand something that this great nation was founded not by religionists but by Christians. And not on the basis of religion, but on the basis of Christianity. And this great nation was underpinned and rooted and founded in the person of Christ and his word, the Bible, and our forefathers never intended that we would have one church or anything like that. They intended on the principles of Christianity and the Bible to give all people freedom to pursue God as they saw fit. And they came up with something so wonderful as this great Constitution – beloved. And it’s because it’s rooted in the person of Christ.

As late as 1892 there’s a court case, and I think most of it has been confirmed, where it’s the Church of the Holy Trinity vs. United States of America where the US Supreme Court said this, said that our laws and institutions must embody and embrace the teachings of Christ, the redeemer of mankind. It cannot be otherwise. And in this sense and to this extent, our laws and

our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian. And friends, let me tell you something, because of that, when our forefathers ratified the Constitution Bill of Rights, God entered into covenant and he has blessed us beloved like no other country on earth. Would you agree with that? Man, it takes ninety-five different countries of the world combined just to equal the gross domestic product of the United States of America. We are more blessed than anybody. Bear with me for a moment because fifty years ago, America decided her heritage was something she didn't want. America decided that she wanted to become a secular nation. And for fifty years now, we have been misinterpreting the separation of church and state.

If you'll study that letter by Thomas Jefferson and compare it with the First Amendment of the Constitution, you'll quickly realize, he never intended for the separation clause, which is not in the Constitution but in that letter, he never intended for that to mean to keep the church out of the state's business. He intended to keep the state out of the church's business. And so we have used the separation now as a crowbar to throw God and Christ and the word of God out of the center of this country. And though we know he's the creator - we know he's God - we no longer honor him as God. We want to be secular; so we've thrown him out. Consequently, when you do that, you cannot create law that corresponds with his word and brings his favor. Inevitably a secular nation will create law that puts us on the course of a head-on collision with God. For instance, if you throw God out, you have to come up with some idea that you're going to teach your kids about where they came from. And you have to teach that in school. And now, all across our nation, kids are taught that they are advanced mutations of a baboon. They are taught that they came from a monkey. Let me tell you something, evolution is not science and I know that's not politically correct. But what it is, is an indoctrination to teach a godless worldview. And it defies our founding documents; our forefathers talked about the Creator in the Declaration of Independence. Read it. Hallelujah!

Consequently, we've throwing God out, beloved. And may I share a concern with you now? Can I share my heart with you just for a moment? I am concerned about this: if you'll study your Bible, when you throw God out as a nation, you see, we're a cannibal to God, individually and as a nation. And when you do, you begin to incur his judgment; his remedial judgments. And I want to submit to you today that we're under five remedial judgments of God in this country, and one of them is called plunderers. And if you'll study your Bible, there's a pattern that God has when he relates to a nation. Listen to me for a moment, I know it's difficult. Just stay with me for a moment. You know September the 11th 2001? Plunderers attacked our nation. And if you'll study that word, plunderers, in Judges 2:5-18, you'll see that it means that God removed his hand and gave us into the hands of plunderers; people of an evil countenance and a wicked heart. Is it not true that God spoke to us on September the 11th 2001? Are you not concerned with me about the cataclysmic events we see in our nation over the last 11 years? Can I share something with you that we'll always have? A cursed cursed nature because of original sin, but the last 11 years, the cataclysmic events of this nation have been so devastating and so frequent. And I'm concerned about it, are you?

I'm concerned that God is speaking to us. When's the last time you've heard of an earthquake hitting Washington D.C. and cracking the Washington monument? And simultaneously a hurricane goes up the through the eastern seaboard and floods New York City then wipes out great portions of Vermont so that whole cities are not even connected anymore by roads. My wife and I had the opportunity to speak with evacuees from New Orleans after Katrina; a great number of them. And I spoke with one lady there for a moment and I asked her, "Do you know the status of your home?" And she said, "Well, I own two homes and they're both underwater." And I said, "Well, you've earned the right to speak to us. What's going on in all this" And she said "I'll tell you Mr. Ledbetter", and she didn't know I was a Pastor, she said "I'll tell ya." She said "I worked for Mayor Nagen; I work at his office. And I'm gonna tell you that God is judging America. And both of my homes are underwater but that's fine with me because we need to get right with God." That spoke to my heart. There was a police officer there and he was in charge of crowd control when they put the people in the Superdome and that roof was torn off and the water came pouring in, and I asked him "What do you say about this?" He said, "Friend, let me tell you something." He said, "Katrina came on board the day before Southern Decadence was open, a festival for seven days in our city. And we've asked the mayor to stop this year after year, where people dance and do lewd things right down there the streets of New Orleans. Take their clothes off and kids all around and get filthy. And let me tell you something, it's no coincidence that Katrina came on board the day before that began in New Orleans, Louisiana. I promise you God is sovereign. God is engaged with us.

Financial loss is one of his judgments. And if you write this down, read Romans 1:18-32, and you'll see that one of those judgments is God starts giving a nation over and he gives him over reprobate mind. A reprobate mind says this: that it's ok for a man to marry a man; a woman to marry a woman. Folks, that's not enlightenment, that's spiritual darkness. And if we think that we're going to make same-sex marriage a civil right and God's going to wink about that and say well God bless America, I would invite us to think again. He's never done it and I don't believe he ever will. Listen, righteousness exalts a nation.

I ask God would he let me say something else today. But I come to you with a burden because we need you. This body has begun to take some courageous steps and I applaud you. And we need you; do the right thing. We need to overturn the shedding of innocent blood of this land. Fifty million babies; you know where they all are? All those babies on the crystal sea before God. I can see 'em out there on the sea; couchie-coo. And look at God the Father; aaah. If you shed innocent blood, as we have for fifty years, there's no nation that has ever survived that, beloved. But you know I believe God is at work in America and we must turn this thing around. Do you? Do you believe that? We must turn it around. And here's the good news, God said this, "Return to me, and I'll return to you." Hallelujah. God said this, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear their prayer from Heaven, and I will answer them, and I'll heal their land." And we must have people in office and put people in office who will make law that corresponds with

the word of God and the will of God. Not political correctness. Not tolerance; it always brews intolerance. That's the good news.

And so let me close by saying we need you. Desperately. And we love you. And even if you disagree with me today, let me tell you something, I love you and we need you desperately in this time. I believe together we can find the answers if we'll seek the Father; he'll show us the way out. We're not going to solve our problems without him. Fifteen trillion dollars of debt, come on. We need God, and we need you. Mister speaker, you've indulged my length, thank you sir. Let us pray.

Speaker of the House, Kris Steele: Members would you please stand and guests in the gallery would you please stand as you are able.

Pastor Ledbetter:

Thank you members of the House.

Our Father, today we humble ourselves before you. We are grateful that still you are at work in America in so many areas. Father, we are thankful for every American, every single American and we desire to bless them Father, but more than anything today, we desire to honor you, Father, in all that we do, so that we can in fact bless our people. Give this body of men and women great courage and strength and especially, I pray the angel of the Lord encamp around about them and their families and Father, protect them. I pray your majesty with respect and hope that I have been pleasing to you, Father, In Jesus' name, Amen.

(Amen from audience and applause)