

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

January 13, 2011

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL
(719) 520-6397**

Board of County Commissioners
c/o Amy Lathen
El Paso County
27 E Vermijo Ave
Colorado Springs CO 80903-2208

Re: Opening Board of County Commissioners Meetings with Prayer

Dear Chairperson Lathen and Commissioners:

I write on behalf of local El Paso County residents and taxpayers, and other Colorado members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) who strenuously oppose the introduction of religious ritual prayer to begin Board of County Commissioners meetings.

It is our information and understanding that newly elected commissioner, Peggy Littleton, has requested the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) begin its Tuesday and Thursday meetings with prayer. Our complainants inform us that the BoCC does not currently pray regularly. In fact, since at least 2006, the BoCC has only included prayer at meetings once a month.

Government prayer is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. Calling upon Commissioners and citizens to rise and pray (even silently) is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular county government. Commissioners 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 County ought not to lend its power and prestige to religion, amounting to a governmental endorsement that excludes the 15% of your population that is nonreligious (Religious Identification Survey 2008). The BoCC compounds the violation when a majority of prayers are to Jesus or a majority of the officiants are Christian or Christian clergy (which inevitably happens). Such prayer creates acrimony, makes minorities feel like political outsiders in their own community, and shows unconstitutional governmental preference not just for religion over nonreligion, but Christianity over other faiths.

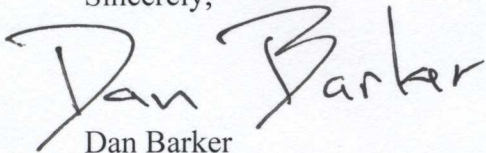
Citizens of all religions or no religion are compelled to come before you on civic, secular matters: variances, sewers, building permits, restaurant licenses, sidewalk repair, etc. They should not be subjected to a religious show or test, or be expected to demonstrate

religious obeisance at a county function. We fail to see why divine guidance is needed over such earthly matters anyway.

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). Observing a strict separation of church and state offends nobody, and honors not only the First Amendment, but also the very tenets being professed during County prayers.

On behalf of our El Paso County membership and our secular Constitution, we urge the BoCC to concentrate on county matters. The tone that should be set is one that respects and reveres the secular and entirely godless U.S. Constitution, which Commissioners take an oath to uphold, and whose only references to religion are exclusionary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dan Barker
FFRF Co-President