



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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February 18, 2010

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL
(770) 594-6414 and (770) 594-6264

The Honorable Jere Wood and Members of the Council
City of Roswell
38 Hill St
Ste 215
Roswell GA 30075

COPY

Re: Opening City Council Meetings with Prayer

Dear Mayor Wood and Members of the Council:

Our national organization, which works to keep state and church separate, has been contacted by taxpayers and residents of Roswell who strenuously oppose the introduction of religious ritual prayer to begin City Council meetings.

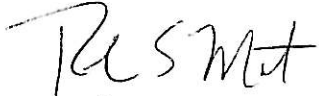
Government prayer is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. Calling upon Council members and citizens to rise and pray (even silently) is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular city government. Council members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They do not need to worship on taxpayers' time. The city 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 Council 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 city 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 City prayers.

On behalf of our Roswell membership and our secular Constitution, we urge the City Council to concentrate on city matters. The tone that should be set is one that respects and reveres the secular and entirely godless U.S. Constitution, which City officials take an oath to uphold, and whose only references to religion are exclusionary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R S Markert'. The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Rebecca S. Markert
Staff Attorney