

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 18, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: Dusty.Deevers@oksenate.gov

The Honorable Dusty Deevers
State Senator
Oklahoma State Senate
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Rm. 533
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: Shocking and Inappropriate Christian Nationalist Declaration

Dear Senator Deevers:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding concerns over your recent declaration that your personal religious beliefs trump federal law. FFRF is a national nonprofit association with 40,000 members across the country, including many members in Oklahoma. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

On March 13, 2024, while on the Oklahoma Senate floor, you declared that federal law should not be obeyed if it violates “God’s word”:¹

Government doesn’t make the law. The people rise up, power rises up from the people, and the people make the law. And that law should be in accordance with God’s word, and the conscience. And these federal laws are restricting both of those things so when this authority, namely the federal government, commands what God’s forbid ...We are not to obey them...

While you are correct that “the people make the law,” your assertion that the law “should be in accordance with God’s word,” is not only wrong, but egregiously so. Your declaration shows brazen support for Christian nationalism—the claim that America is a Christian nation, that religious law should prevail and that certain Christian adherents are the true Americans—and blatant disregard for the separation of state and church, in betrayal of your oath of office to the entirely secular U.S. Constitution.

The constitutional principle separating religion from government was the uniquely American vision of our revolutionary Founders. After centuries of bloody religious wars, inquisitions, crusades and pogroms in the Old World, and of the persecutions in the name of religion in most of the original colonies, the Framers were acutely aware of the danger and folly of mixing state and church. They deliberately and purposefully adopted the first constitution in history excluding any mention of a deity.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSeBszlY1jE>

Every reference to religion in the U.S. Constitution is exclusionary, including: a direct prohibition on religious tests for public office, an implicit prohibition in the godless oath of office prescribed for the presidency and later, in the First Amendment's historic bar of any establishment of religion by the government. The Framers of the Constitution made the United States first among nations to invest sovereignty not in a deity, but in "We the People." The proscription against religion in government has served our nation well, with the U.S. Constitution now the longest living constitution in history, and our nation spared the constant religious wars afflicting theocratic regions around the world.

Christianity and religion in general are inherently divisive. Keeping religion out of the government is a fundamental American ideal, essential for true religious freedom, and has been a tremendous asset to our society. This is a principle to revere. Your advocacy for Christian theocracy is unAmerican.

Your assertion that your personal religious beliefs trump federal law is anathema to America's founding principles and the views of most Americans, including Christians.² Many American Christians respect the diversity of our culture, and understand that their fellow Americans may not share their religious values, as evidenced by groups like Christians Against Christian Nationalism.³ Anyone who respects American values *must* oppose Christian nationalism, as the two ideologies are fundamentally at odds.

Your advocacy for Christian theocracy is not only at odds with our country's history and laws, but stigmatizes and marginalizes many of your constituents. Non-religious Americans are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — 37 percent of Americans are non-Christians, and this includes the nearly one in three Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated.⁴ You represent *all* of the constituents in your district, including those who do not share your personal religious beliefs. Your statements convey that you consider non-Christians second-class citizens simply because of their religious identity or nonreligious identity. That too is unAmerican.

The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to our secular Constitution wisely prohibits the kind of Christian theocracy you are advocating for. The Supreme Court has long held that the Establishment Clause "mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The Supreme Court has also stated, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that **no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion . . .**" *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (emphasis added)..

² Americans' Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for Its Role, Pew Research Center (June 6, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/values-and-expectations-of-government/>

³ www.christiansagainsthristiannationalism.org/statement.

⁴ Gregory A. Smith, About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.

This wise separation between religion and government embodied in the Establishment Clause has largely protected the United States from the religious slaughter and persecution rife around the world and historically whenever the government and religion are aligned:

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.” *State ex rel. Weiss v. Dist. Bd. of Sch. Dist. No. 8 of City of Edgerton*, 76 Wis. 177, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890).

As a state senator, your duty is to support the state and federal Constitutions and to protect the rights of conscience of your constituents, not to promote your personal religious views, much less a Christian theocracy. Your oath of office has charged you with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not or do not share your personal religious viewpoints. You have shown that you are unfit for this responsibility. If you cannot uphold the law without regard to whether it comports with your personal religious beliefs, then you should resign immediately.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents
ALG/DB:cal