

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: ltgovernorjeanette.nunez@eog.myflorida.com

The Honorable Jeanette Nuñez
Lieutenant Governor
State of Florida
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: “Vote like atheists”

Dear Lieutenant Governor Nuñez:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Florida membership to object to your recent statement denigrating atheists while promoting your own Christian beliefs. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with 40,000 members across the country, including nearly 2,000 members in Florida and a regional chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that on Monday, Oct. 21, during a “campaign-like rally” where you and Governor DeSantis appeared in your official capacities to fight against an abortion rights amendment on the ballot in Florida, you remarked, “We cannot go to church and pray like Christians and turn around and vote like atheists.”¹ The event closed with a prayer by Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski:

We pray ... that you awaken in every heart of the citizens of this great state of Florida reverence for the work of your hands and renew among your people a readiness to nurture and sustain your precious gift of human life.

The obvious take-away from your comment is that it’s wrong to “vote like an atheist,” and also that Christians don’t support reproductive freedom. Your remarks not only show an unseemly hostility to millions of good, taxpaying Americans who are atheists, but reveal you are not up-to-date with current surveys on approval of abortion rights by Americans of diverse faiths. With the exception of white evangelical Protestants and a minority of similar believers, a majority of religious Americans² actually support abortion rights: 64 percent of white nonevangelical Protestants, 71 percent of Black Protestants and 59 percent of Catholics. Even 53 percent of Mormons³ say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. The highest percentage in favor of abortion rights is the religiously unaffiliated, at 86 percent, and that is something to be proud of.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/abortion-ron-desantis-florida-election-2024-6fa32787580e935a819248504345cb3c>.

² Public opinion on abortion: Views on abortion, 1995–2004, Pew:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion/>.

³ Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/views-about-abortion/>.

While your remarks were intended to denigrate atheists and promote your own Christian beliefs, in fact we would suggest that our country would be a whole lot better off if more people “voted like an atheist.” Voting like an atheist means supporting the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, understanding the science of climate change, championing individual rights and personal freedoms — including the right to legal abortion care, and preserving our democracy against Christian nationalists who want to impose their religion on everyone else. In just about any recent survey on these subjects by Pew Research or Public Religion Research Institute, atheists in particular or “Nones” (religiously unaffiliated) as a whole have been shown to be the true values voters. For example, atheists are the most supportive of rights for LGBTQ Americans.⁴

We request that in the future you refrain from using your elected position as lieutenant governor to denigrate minority beliefs on religion while promoting your own personal religious beliefs. You are free to practice your religion in your personal capacity, but you are abusing your position as a government official when you turn one class — your kind of Christian — into a favored class, and turn another class — atheists — into a disfavored class.

As Florida’s lieutenant governor, you are tasked with upholding the U.S. Constitution — including the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. You serve a religiously diverse state that consists not only of Christians, but also Jewish, Muslim, atheist and other non-Christian constituents. When you promote Christianity through official communications, you marginalize and exclude many of your constituents. Thirty-seven percent of Americans are non-Christian, including nearly one-in-three Americans on a national level who are now religiously unaffiliated.⁵ The religiously unaffiliated specifically comprise 26 percent of Florida’s population.⁶

The separation between state and church is one of the most fundamental principles of our system of government. The Supreme Court has specifically 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 or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.” *West Virginia Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943).

Please start honoring the secular Constitution you took an oath to uphold.

Sincerely,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

⁴ “Nones” and LGBTQ Politics, Emily Kazyak, et al, PRRI: <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/nones-and-lgbtq-politics/>.

⁵ Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.

⁶ PRRI: American Values Atlas: <https://ava.prii.org/#religious/2022/States/religion/m/US-FL>.