

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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July 7, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: senator@schumer.senate.gov

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: False attribution to Founders of “God’s noble experiment“

Dear Senator Schumer,

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding your recent Independence Day message in which you stated that “The founding fathers called America God’s noble experiment.” FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 nonreligious members across the country, including more than 2,160 in New York state. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

On July 4, you tweeted a religious message from your official Senate X Account:¹

Happy 250th, America!

The founding fathers called America God’s noble experiment. I believe in all three words to this day: we are one nation under God, we have clung to noble ideas for longer than any other nation, and we are an experiment always changing, trying to make ourselves better.

God bless America, and I hope everyone has a wonderful day celebrating with their friends and family.

Although this July 4 post brought renewed attention to this claim, we understand that it is not the first time you have attributed this phrase to the Founders. We understand you have repeatedly made this assertion in speeches spanning more than two decades, including remarks concerning judicial nominations, voting rights, Supreme Court confirmations, consumer protection, and the preservation of democracy.²

¹ <https://x.com/SenSchumer/status/2073391216561996128>

² <https://www.friendlyatheist.com/p/chuck-schumers-favorite-founding>

Despite your repeated use of this phrase, no evidence exists that any Founder ever described the United States as “God’s noble experiment.” Historians have been unable to identify any contemporary source for the quotation. More importantly, attributing such religious language to the Founders falsely suggests they viewed the United States as a divinely ordained nation, a claim that is fundamentally at odds with the secular Constitution they drafted.

Yale historian Joanne Freeman recently noted that among the more than 100,000 documents contained in the National Archives’ Founders Online database, “No one uses the phrase ‘God’s noble experiment.’ No one.”³ Other historians have likewise been unable to identify any contemporary source for the quotation. The earliest known appearance appears not in the Founding era, but in a 1939 book review discussing nineteenth-century Protestant nativism—not as a quotation from any Founder.⁴

Historical accuracy matters, particularly when public officials invoke the Founders to explain our constitutional system.

Unfortunately, false quotations about the Founders have become a hallmark of the Christian nationalist movement. Figures such as David Barton have spent decades promoting fabricated or distorted historical claims in an effort to portray the United States as a nation founded to privilege Christianity. FFRF has devoted considerable effort to correcting those myths because they distort both our history and our Constitution.

For that reason, it is especially troubling to see the Senate Minority Leader repeating a quotation that appears to have no historical basis and which appears to marginalize nonbelievers and the religiously unaffiliated, who now surpass any one religious denomination, comprising 29 percent of the adult U.S. population.⁵ Christian nationalists have spent decades inventing quotations and rewriting history to portray the United States as a Christian nation. Your repetition of this fabricated quotation risks legitimizing precisely the disinformation they have worked to disseminate.

The actual history is both simpler and more inspiring. The United States was founded by Enlightenment thinkers who deliberately established the world’s first secular constitutional republic. If the Framers had intended to create a Christian nation, they knew exactly how to do so. Instead, they adopted a Constitution that vests sovereignty in “We the People” rather than a divine being, prohibits religious tests for public office in Article VI, and, through the First Amendment, bars government from establishing religion while protecting every individual’s freedom of conscience. Our Constitution is godless.

Many of the Founders were particularly wary of forming a country that commingled religion with government. That is why they drafted a Constitution that effectively formed “a wall of separation between church and state.” This is perfectly exemplified in George Washington’s response to a letter from Presbyterian Ministers in Massachusetts and New Hampshire

³ *Id.*

⁴ <https://bsky.app/profile/adamkeiper.com/post/3mpwzhmbnhs2s>

⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/>

expressing their disappointment in the absence of “some Explicit acknowledgement of the only true God and Jesus Christ” in the Constitution. Washington replied “that the path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction. To this consideration we ought to ascribe the absence of any regulation, respecting religion, from the [Constitution] of our country.”⁶

In 1791, America famously signed a treaty with Tripoli declaring that the “government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” This treaty, drafted during George Washington’s presidency, approved unanimously by the Senate, and signed by John Adams, is a reminder that the Founders explicitly held out the United States as a government that separated state from church. It is pure misinformation to suggest that our nation is founded on religious principles. The Bill of Rights was adopted the same year, with its First Amendment barring any religious establishment of religion by government and protecting rights of conscience.

The United States was 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. Keeping religion out of government has in fact allowed religion to flourish on our continent, because it protects freedom of conscience. Keeping divisive religion out of the government is a fundamental American ideal, is essential for true religious freedom, and has been a tremendous asset to our society.

We respectfully ask that you correct the record and refrain from repeating this inaccurate attribution in future public statements. At a time when Christian nationalists are aggressively rewriting our nation’s history to portray the United States as founded for Christianity, public officials have a special responsibility to rely on authentic history, not invented quotations. You should not inadvertently reinforce the same myths being promoted by those seeking to erode state/church separation, the principle upon which individual liberties rest.

Americans deserve historical accuracy from their elected leaders. We urge you to correct the record and continue defending our nation’s genuine constitutional heritage.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

⁶ Letter from George Washington to Presbyterian Ministers of Massachusetts and New Hampshire (Nov. 2, 1789).