

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 5, 2026

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & FAX: 202-225-0148

The Honorable Mark Alford
United States House of Representatives
328 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Your remarks about government and religion

Dear Representative Alford:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), our Missouri membership and nonreligious Missouri citizens in response to your recent attack on the bedrock constitutional separation of church and state, and to correct the serious misinformation promoted during the July 17 episode of your podcast, “Getting Comfortable with Mark Alford.”

FFRF’s purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public about nontheism. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 members, including nearly 500 current members in Missouri. More than a third of your constituents — 33 percent — are atheists, agnostics or religiously unaffiliated and another four percent belong to non-Christian faiths.¹

Your recent episode centered on what you introduced as “the separation of church and state, or the myth of that.” You complained that “demonic forces” criticize you when you post religious messages and you asked your guest, Pastor Malachi O’Brien, “How did we buy into this lie from Satan that the church and the state have no mixture at all?”

O’Brien agreed that church-state separation is “a demonic lie.” He went on to claim that “Christians should run their own country,” urge conservative Christians to seek positions on school boards and other governmental bodies, and encourage them to use those positions to place “good Christian books” in public school libraries. Rather than challenge these overtly Christian nationalist statements, you repeatedly affirmed his message.

Sir: The separation of church and state is neither a myth nor a “satanic” lie. It is a foundational American principle embodied in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The fact that the phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear in the Constitution does not negate the principle. President Thomas Jefferson in 1802 famously coined the metaphor explaining the meaning of the Establishment Clause of the First

¹ Pew Religious Landscape Survey, Missouri:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/state/missouri/>.

Amendment, by saying it erects “a wall of separation between church and state.”² Neither do the phrases “separation of powers,” “rule of law,” “fair trial” or “religious liberty” appear in the Constitution, yet each describes well-established constitutional principles.

The First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing religion while protecting every individual’s right to exercise religion freely. Those guarantees work together. Americans enjoy religious freedom precisely because the government may not interfere with that freedom.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Establishment Clause “mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *see also Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The Court has also declared: “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 State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943).

Your suggestion that church/state separation somehow excludes religious Americans from government is vacuous. Christians have the same right as any other citizens to vote, run for office and participate in public life. But they do not have the right to use public office to impose their personal religious doctrine upon others or turn government institutions into instruments of evangelism, any more than Muslims or “Satanists” would have such a right.

There is a distinction between Christians serving in government and Christians using government to serve Christianity. Your podcast deliberately blurred that line.

You also promoted the worn-out falsehood that the Constitution protects “freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.” It necessarily protects *both*. Freedom of religion is meaningless without the freedom to reject religion. A government empowered to pressure citizens to live according to someone else’s doctrines does not protect religious freedom. It destroys it.

Our nation is governed by a godless Constitution, which invests sovereignty not in a deity but in “We the People.” The Constitution’s only explicit references to religion *exclude* it from government, such as that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust.” U.S. Const. art. VI. Americans may practice any religion they choose or none at all. Non-Christians and nonbelievers are not second-class citizens. Our government may not take sides on matters of religion.

Contrary to your podcast remarks, the United States was not founded as a Christian nation. The Constitution contains no reference to Christianity. It establishes no official religion and derives no authority from the bible. Instead, it creates a secular republic grounded in popular sovereignty and individual rights. That framework allows people of different beliefs to live peaceably together as equal citizens.

² Letter from President Thomas Jefferson to Baptists of Danbury, Jan. 1, 1802: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-to-the-danbury-baptist-association/>.

You also boasted that “Jesus Christ is alive and well on Capitol Hill,” discussed congressional bible studies and prayer gatherings, and praised government officials for incorporating prayer into official proceedings. You are free to participate in private religious activities and speak about your personal faith, but your *public* office is not a platform to put down other religions or nonreligion.

O’Brien’s declaration that “Christians should run their own country” is the language of Christian nationalism, not constitutional democracy. This country belongs equally to *every* American.

His call for Christians to obtain school board positions and use their governmental authority to place Christian materials in public school libraries is similarly alarming. Public schools exist to educate, not evangelize. School board members have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion. Students and families of every faith and no faith are entitled to public schools that do not treat them as outsiders.

When you characterize criticism of your religious messaging as the work of “demonic forces” and describe state/church separation as a “lie from Satan,” you send an unmistakable message that constituents who do not believe in the primitive idea of demons or gods are enemies rather than citizens you were elected to serve.

Your oath of office was to protect and defend the Constitution, not the bible. You were not elected to be a pastor. Missouri’s 4th Congressional District is not your congregation.

We urge you to publicly retract the historical and constitutional misinformation promoted during your podcast, and reject O’Brien’s assertion that Christians should “run their own country.” This is not just *your* country; it belongs to all of us. Please respect the boundary between your personal faith and your public office.

The separation of church and state is not hostile to religion. As a member of Congress, your duty is to defend that wonderful American principle, not demonize it.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents
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