FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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November 16, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: agsec@usda.gov

Secretary Brooke Rollins
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Continued unconstitutional promotion of religion through official USDA communications and programming

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to yet another official U.S. Department of Agriculture communication promoting Christianity to federal employees, this time in your Veterans Day message. As you are aware from our previous correspondence, FFRF is a national nonprofit organization working to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

On April 8 and July 10, 2026, we wrote to your office regarding repeated instances of religious promotion through official USDA communications and programming. These included an explicitly Christian Easter devotional, a Memorial Day message invoking the Christian promise of eternal salvation, an Independence Day message calling for God's favor, and the Department's organization and promotion of official prayer and worship services. We urged you to respect the religious diversity of USDA employees and cease using government resources to promote religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, your November 11 Veterans Day message demonstrates that these concerns remain unaddressed.

Your message appropriately recognized the sacrifices of our nation's veterans, highlighted the 9,698 veterans employed by USDA, and celebrated the Department's successful initiative to hire additional veterans and military spouses. These are commendable accomplishments worthy of recognition. Yet, in the midst of an otherwise secular tribute to military service, you once again chose to inject Christianity into an official department-wide communication:

> In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul directs us to give "respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." Surely, few are owed more honor and respect than our veterans, and on Veterans Day, we give them what they deserve.

There is no reason for a Cabinet secretary to invoke the Apostle Paul or quote Christian scripture to recognize the sacrifices of American veterans. Honoring military service is a civic

responsibility shared by Americans of every religious belief and no religious belief at all. It does not require biblical justification.

The inclusion of this Bible verse is particularly troubling given your office's established pattern of using official communications to promote Christianity. Viewed in isolation, a passing biblical quotation may appear less overtly sectarian than the extended Christian devotional you distributed on Easter. But this message cannot reasonably be viewed in isolation. It is the latest in a series of official communications that repeatedly frame national observances and the Department's work through a Christian religious lens.

Veterans Day should be an occasion to honor **all** who have served our country, including the many atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other nonreligious Americans who have worn our nation's uniform.[1] These veterans served and sacrificed for the same constitutional freedoms as their religious counterparts. Their service is no less honorable because they do not subscribe to the teachings of the Apostle Paul or any other religious figure.

The same is true of the thousands of USDA employees who do not share your religious beliefs. They deserve to receive official workplace communications without repeatedly encountering religious messages from the head of their department. Your continued invocation of the Bible in government communications conveys that Christianity occupies a privileged position within USDA leadership and that employees who do not share those beliefs are outsiders.

The First Amendment's Establishment Clause protects against governmental favoritism toward religion. See *McCreary Cnty. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968). Although not every passing religious reference by a government official independently violates the Establishment Clause, the Constitution does not give federal officials unrestricted license to use their positions and government resources to advance religious beliefs. The recurring nature of these messages, particularly alongside USDA-sponsored religious programming, raises serious constitutional concerns about the Department's institutional promotion of Christianity.

You are, of course, free to practice your Christian faith and express your religious beliefs in your personal capacity. But when you communicate with USDA employees in your official capacity as Secretary of Agriculture, you speak on behalf of the federal government, not merely as a private citizen. Your responsibility is to serve and respect all USDA employees, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

It is especially disappointing that, despite our repeated objections and the concerns raised by USDA employees, your office continues to insert religious messaging into occasions that should unite rather than divide the federal workforce. Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day belong to all Americans. They should not be repeatedly used as opportunities to promote the religious beliefs of USDA leadership.

We therefore renew our request that you cease including Bible verses, religious exhortations, and devotional messages in official USDA communications, and that the Department discontinue its sponsorship and promotion of official prayer and worship services. We also ask that you provide

[1] https://ffrf.org/news/releases/saluting-atheists-in-foxholes-on-veterans-day/.

a written response explaining what steps, if any, USDA has taken to address the concerns raised in our April 8 and July 10 letters and whether the Department intends to establish safeguards against further government-sponsored religious promotion.

USDA employees should not have to repeatedly ask their own government to respect their freedom of conscience. We urge you to honor the constitutional principles that our veterans have served to defend by ensuring that USDA remains welcoming and inclusive of Americans of all faiths and none.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Legal Counsel
Freedom From Religion Foundation