

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I have attached for your consideration a proposed constitutional amendment to restore the simple freedom of our citizens to offer prayer in our public schools and institutions. The public expression through prayer of our faith in God is a fundamental part of our American heritage and a privilege which should not be excluded by law from any American school, public or private.

One hundred fifty years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville found that all Americans believed that religious faith was indispensable to the maintenance of their republican institutions. 1 de Tocqueville, Democracy in America 316 (Vintage ed. 1945). Today, I join with the people of this nation in acknowledging this basic truth; that our liberty springs from and depends upon an abiding faith in God. This has been clear from the time of George Washington, who stated in his farewell address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. . . . (R)eason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

35 The Writings of George Washington 229 (J. Fitzpatrick ed. 1940).

Nearly every President since Washington has proclaimed a day of public prayer and thanksgiving to acknowledge the many favors of Almighty God. We have acknowledged God's guidance on our coinage, in our national anthem, and in the Pledge of Allegiance. As the Supreme Court has stated: "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." Zorach v. Clauson, 343 U.S. 306, 313 (1952).

The founders of our nation and the framers of the First Amendment did not intend to forbid public prayer. On the contrary, prayer has been part of our public assemblies since Benjamin Franklin's eloquent request that prayer be observed by the Constitutional Convention:

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that God governs in the affairs of men. . . . I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. . . .

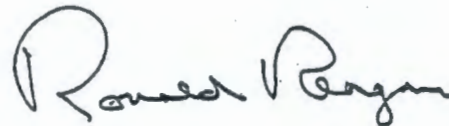
I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business. . . .

<sup>1</sup> The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, 451-52 (M. Farrand ed. 1966).

Just as Benjamin Franklin believed it was beneficial for the Constitutional Convention to begin each day's work with a prayer, I believe that it would be beneficial for our children to have an opportunity to begin each school day in the same manner. Since the law has been construed to prohibit this, I believe that the law should be changed. It is time for the people, through their Congress and the state legislatures, to act, using the means afforded them by the Constitution.

The amendment I propose will remove the bar to school prayer established by the Supreme Court and allow prayer back in our schools. However, the amendment also expressly affirms the right of anyone to refrain from prayer. The amendment will allow communities to determine for themselves whether prayer should be permitted in their public schools and to allow individuals to decide for themselves whether they wish to participate in prayer.

I am confident that such an amendment will be quickly adopted, for the vast majority of our people believe there is a need for prayer in our public schools and institutions. I look forward to working with Congress to achieve the passage of this amendment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ronald Reagan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the main text block.

THE WHITE HOUSE,  
May 17, 1982.

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is hereby proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution if ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress:

"ARTICLE \_\_\_\_\_

"Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. No person shall be required by the United States or by any State to participate in prayer."