

Congressional Prayer Caucus
2013 YEAR IN REVIEW

initiatives led by
MEMBERS *of the*
CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS

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Throughout recorded history, men and women have sought to find meaning and purpose in the lives they lived. Some have found it in the accumulation of wealth, power, or fame; others in intellectual or athletic pursuits. But countless Americans have found that meaning and purpose in their faith.

Our Founders realized that it would be foolish, unwise, or even arrogant to declare one worldview superior to another. However, they also knew that to deny the religious liberty that was so precious to so many would be to make it virtually impossible for them to seek that pursuit of happiness which was such an integral part of their life and liberty. They realized that true religious liberty is more than the thoughts one has while cloistered within the four corners of his or her home. They knew, as John Kennedy later expressed, that religious beliefs without religious conviction—action—has no significance.

They therefore sought to enshrine in the Bill of Rights the right of citizens to express their religious beliefs which included what they said, how they lived their lives, and how they used their resources. Religious freedom in America has consistently extended beyond religious worship, enabling the faithful to contribute to our society in a unique and meaningful way. Unfortunately, many today have forgotten the importance of these principles, culminating in the words of a recent opinion by a New Mexico Supreme Court Justice suggesting that the surrender of the very beliefs that inspire our lives is sometimes the “price of citizenship.”

Since our nation’s earliest days, faith has been a cornerstone for countless Americans. Some of the first settlers journeyed to the New World in search of the freedom to exercise their convictions. When declaring their independence, the founders drew upon the universal truths that all men are equal and possess inalienable rights given to them by their Creator. The first act of America’s first Congress in 1774 was to ask a minister to open with prayer and to lead Congress in the reading of four chapters of the Bible. For more than half of the 19th century, the U.S. Capitol building was regularly used as a church; and by 1867, the church at the Capitol was the largest church in Washington, D.C.

In his Thanksgiving proclamation in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt recounted this legacy of faith: “Thus from our earliest recorded history, Americans have thanked God for their blessings. In our deepest natures, in our very souls, we, like all mankind since the earliest origin of mankind, turn to God in time of trouble and in time of happiness.” Then in 1956, amidst the Civil Rights Movement, Congress adopted “In God We Trust” as our official national motto. The freedom to live in accordance with one’s faith was reinforced in subsequent decades as protections were enacted to preserve diversity within the public square. Efforts like Title VII of the Civil Rights Act were crafted to prevent employment discrimination, while simultaneously preserving the freedom of faith-based employers to operate in accordance with the beliefs that often inspired their very existence.

The **CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS** is a bipartisan group of more than 100 Members of the House of Representatives who work to protect religious freedom in America and to preserve our nation’s rich spiritual heritage. During 2013, Members of the Prayer Caucus introduced legislation, wrote letters, and delivered remarks before many audiences supporting these fundamental principles. They called on executive agencies and officials in the military to preserve the freedom of people of faith to operate in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs. In addition, they continued meeting each week in the U.S. Capitol building to pray for our nation. Members of the Prayer Caucus were at the forefront on these issues, spearheading initiatives to support the following goals:

**RECOGNIZE *the* IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN AMERICA'S FOUNDING *and*
SUBSEQUENT HISTORY**

DEFEND THE RIGHT OF FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION

PROTECT PUBLIC PRAYER

PRESERVE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM *for* SERVICEMEMBERS

**DEFEND AGAINST ATTEMPTS *to* REMOVE RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS FROM *the*
PUBLIC SQUARE**

**RECOGNIZED THE *Importance of Faith* IN AMERICA'S FOUNDING AND
SUBSEQUENT HISTORY**

Defended our national motto, “In God We Trust.” Members filed an [amicus curiae brief](#) defending the inclusion of our national motto, “In God We Trust,” on U.S. currency. The case was dismissed in September, 2013. During the 112th Congress, Rep. Randy Forbes introduced [H.Con.Res.13](#) to reaffirm our motto and to encourage its display in public buildings and government institutions. The legislation passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 396-9.

Fought attempts to remove “Under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance. Rep. Mike McIntyre, Co-Chairman of the Prayer Caucus, led Members in an [amicus curiae brief](#) defending the inclusion of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. As a national symbol, the Pledge serves to unify Americans in remembrance of the fragile and precious freedoms we have in this country. There have been at least three failed attempts to challenge “under God” in the Pledge.

DEFENDED THE RIGHT OF *Free Exercise of Religion*

Defending the conscience rights of all Americans. Rep. Diane Black introduced legislation to amend the Affordable Care Act to ensure that religious organizations, private businesses, institutions of higher education, health care providers, and insurance companies are not required to sponsor insurance coverage that violates their moral or religious beliefs. Currently, the law requires many people of faith to either violate their religious beliefs or else face steep, crippling fines for honoring their conscience. Members of the Prayer Caucus have additionally engaged in ongoing efforts to reverse the infringement on religious freedom caused by the HHS mandate, including:

- [Asking](#) Speaker of the House John Boehner to include conscience protections in any legislation addressing the budget or the debt ceiling.
- Speaking on the [House floor](#) on June 12, 2013, about the HHS mandate’s infringements on religious liberty.

Celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Rep. Forbes spoke at a Capitol Hill event, honoring the 20th anniversary of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). RFRA prohibits the government from substantially burdening the free exercise of religion without a

compelling state interest, and it has played a crucial role in protecting fundamental First Amendment rights. Rep. Lipinski, submitted comments for the Congressional Record honoring this landmark, stating, “Congress shall not pass laws that get in the way of Americans from exercising their religious beliefs and conscience rights.”

Honored religious freedom on the House floor in recognition of Constitution Day. Rep. Forbes led Members in a special order hour on the [House floor](#) in honor of the 226th anniversary of the United States Constitution, highlighting the importance of religious freedom in America.

Worked to protect the symbols and traditions of Christmas. Members of the Prayer Caucus supported [H.Res.489](#), introduced by Rep. Doug Lamborn, which expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the symbols and traditions of Christmas should be protected for use by those that celebrate Christmas.

PROTECTED PUBLIC *Prayer*

Supported legislative prayer at the U.S. Supreme Court. Members of the Prayer Caucus signed an [amicus curiae brief](#) asking the Supreme Court to reverse a decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, holding that despite a highly inclusive prayer policy, public prayer before town meetings in the town of Greece, New York was unconstitutional. Members had previously signed an [amicus curiae brief](#), asking the Court to take up the case. The brief points out that, though “Congress opens its daily sessions with legislative prayer, a practice that is fully consistent with the Establishment Clause,” this “longstanding prayer practice would fail under the tests promulgated by the Second Circuit in this case and the Fourth Circuit in previous cases.”

Supported the freedom of school boards to open meetings with prayer. Rep. Tim Walberg introduced legislation supporting the freedom of school boards to engage in prayer at meetings. [H.Res.250](#) recognizes that school boards, like other legislative bodies, enjoy the fundamental freedom of opening their meetings with prayer.

Defended events related to the National Day of Prayer. Co-chairs of the Caucus, Reps. Forbes and McIntyre, led Members of the Prayer Caucus in a letter of encouragement to the Mayor of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Mayor DuPree came under fire from the Freedom From Religion Foundation for hosting a prayer breakfast in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer.

PRESERVED *Religious Freedom* FOR OUR SERVICEMEMBERS

Opposed the removal of “so help me God” from military oaths. Rep. Jim Bridenstine led Members of Congress in sending a letter to the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy, Lt. Gen. Michelle Johnson, expressing concern over the removal of “so help me God” from three military oaths printed in the 2012 Cadet Contrails Handbook. Each of the oaths includes the phrase as they appear in the text of the United States Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. Reps. S. Johnson and Lamborn introduced [H.R. 3416](#) to preserve and protect “God” in our solemn oaths, requiring the approval of Congress before any oath taken by cadets and midshipmen at U.S. military academies can be changed.

Called for specific religious freedom protections for service members. In the 112th Congress, Members of the Prayer Caucus worked tirelessly to pass religious freedom and conscience protections to formally assure Americans that our citizens need not leave their faith at home when they volunteer to

serve. These protections were included in Section 533 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2013. Upon signing the NDAA into law, however, President Obama called these protections “unnecessary and ill-advised.” Throughout 2013, Prayer Caucus Members tirelessly urged the Department of Defense to implement the required protections:

- Rep. Forbes questioned Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on the status of the regulations at a congressional hearing.
- Rep. Lamborn led a letter to Secretary Hagel, requesting information on when the conscience protections would be finalized and implemented.
- Rep. Fleming led efforts to legislatively strengthen the enacted conscience protections in the NDAA for FY 2014.

Defended the essential need of providing chaplains for our servicemembers at all times. During the lapse in appropriations, chaplains serving the military on contract were furloughed. Rep. Doug Collins, who is also a chaplain in the Air Force Reserves, introduced [H.Con.Res. 58](#), expressing the sense of Congress of the need for continued availability of religious services to servicemembers and their families during the shutdown. The bill passed the House overwhelmingly by a vote of 400-1. Rep. Forbes also led Members in a letter to Secretary Hagel, asking why the furloughed chaplains were not permitted to continue working when the services they provide are essential and facilitate a fundamental constitutional right for our servicemembers and their families.

FOUGHT ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE *Religious Symbols* FROM THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Defended World War II Memorial. Members of the Prayer Caucus signed two *amicus curiae* briefs, in [September](#) 2012 and [January](#) 2013, defending a World War II Memorial in Montana that includes a statue of Jesus. The statue was first erected by the Knights of Columbus in 1954 in Montana’s Flathead National Forest. A federal district court dismissed the case in June, 2013.

SPECIAL APPRECIATION

The members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus would like to thank Representatives Candice Miller and Susan Davis, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on House Administration, for implementing a policy permitting Members to use holiday salutations such as “Merry Christmas” in their constituent communications. This is the first time since 1974 that Members have been able to recognize this federal holiday in their salutations.

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