



Congressman J. Randy Forbes

Virginia's Fourth Congressional District

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Forbes: Criminalization of Prayer in America Upon Us

Washington, D.C. – Congressman J. Randy Forbes (VA-04) announced today his support for a Florida high school principal and athletic directory who face criminal contempt charges for asking someone to pray over a meal. Pace High School Principal Frank Lay and Athletic Director Robert Freeman face fines, jail time, and loss of their retirement benefits for allegedly violating a court order prohibiting prayer. They will face a criminal trial this Thursday, September 17th in federal court.

KEY FACTS:

- Principal and Athletic Director face **criminal charges** for asking for prayer for meal.
- Individuals could face fines, jail time, and a loss of retirement benefits if convicted.
- The trial takes place on Thursday, September 17 – National Constitution Day.

“This week the small school district of Santa Rosa County, Florida has captured the attention of at least 30 Members of Congress – not because of any political opportunity or hidden agenda. It is because this case signifies an effort to criminalize prayer in America. Today it is school employees in Santa Rosa County. Tomorrow it could be your child's high school coach, your school's athletic sponsors, or your spouse. If we do not stand up today for our religious liberties and the right of all Americans to pray according to their faith, our children and grandchildren will have no foundation left on which to pray,” said Forbes.

Congressman Forbes, Congressman Jeff Miller (FL-01), and over 30 other Members of Congress have joined together in writing [a letter](#) of support for the Santa Rosa County school employees. Congressman Forbes and other Members of Congress will speak on this issue on the Floor of the House of Representatives tonight following last votes.

Last year the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against the Florida school district, claiming that some of the teachers and administration “endorsed” religion. Rather than fight the lawsuit, the district consented to a very broad order fashioned by the ACLU, prohibiting all prayer at school sponsored events. The ACLU complained that Mr. Freeman and Mr. Lay violated the order at the luncheon, so a federal judge initiated criminal contempt proceedings and referred the case to the United States Attorney's office for prosecution.

A federal court then entered an Order, which unconstitutionally infringes on the rights of teachers, administrators, and students. According to the final order issued, the President of the United States could not deliver a speech in the school district that concluded with the phrase “God Bless America.”

Congressman Forbes is Chairman and Founder of the Congressional Prayer Caucus, a group in Congress leading efforts to protect the right of Americans to pray. For more information on the Prayer Caucus, click [here](#).

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