

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

February 25, 2011

Gregg Moore, Chair  
Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors  
721 Oxford Ave  
Eau Claire, WI 54703

**Re: County Board of Supervisors Invocations**

Dear Mr. Moore and Members of the County Board:

Our national organization, which works to keep state and church separate, has been contacted by taxpayers and residents of Eau Claire who strenuously oppose the practice of prayers at County Board of Supervisors meetings. It is our information and understanding that the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors ("Board") includes prayers as part of its meetings.

Government prayer is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. Calling upon Board members and citizens to rise and pray (even silently) is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular city government. Board members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They do not need to worship on taxpayers' time. The county ought not to lend its power and prestige to religion, amounting to a governmental endorsement that excludes the 15% of your population that is nonreligious (Religious Identification Survey 2008). The Board compounds the violation when a majority of prayers are sectarian, in this case to Jesus, or a majority of the officiants are of one religion, in this case Christian or Christian clergy (which inevitably happens). Such prayer creates acrimony, makes minorities feel like political outsiders in their own community, and shows unconstitutional governmental preference not just for religion over nonreligion, but Christianity over other faiths.

Citizens of all religions or no religion are compelled to come before you on civic, secular matters: variances, sewers, building permits, restaurant licenses, sidewalk repair, etc. They should not be subjected to a religious show or test, or be expected to demonstrate religious obeisance at a county function. We fail to see why divine guidance is needed over such earthly matters anyway.

Christians who know their bible are familiar with the biblical injunction of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemning as hypocrisy public prayer. "Enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." (Matthew 6:5-13).

Observing a strict separation of church and state offends nobody, and honors not only the First Amendment, but also the very tenets being professed during County prayers.

On behalf of our Eau Claire membership and our secular constitution, we urge the County Board of Supervisors to concentrate on county matters. The tone that should be set is one that respects and reveres the secular and entirely godless U.S. constitution, which County officials take an oath to uphold, and whose only references to religion are exclusionary.

May we hear from you in writing at your earliest convenience what steps you are taking to remedy this First Amendment violation?

Yours very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-President