

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

January 10, 2022

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND FAX: (405) 521-6246**

The Honorable John O'Connor  
Attorney General, State of Oklahoma  
313 NE 21st St.  
Oklahoma City OK 73105

Re: The United States is not a God-based country

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Oklahoma membership to object to your recent troubling remarks offered at a Rotary Club luncheon suggesting that America is not truly governed by majority rule, but rather by “God the creator.” As an elected official, you have an obligation to uphold—and understand—the Constitution.

FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 35,000 members, including members in Oklahoma. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church, and educates about nontheism.

In your speech, you declared that individual rights are under attack in our country and that “we need to vigorously defend the rights and liberties belonging to we the people.” You rightly note that our country has made “colossal mistakes” throughout its history. You blame these mistakes on “the majority” and include on the list of mistakes: treating Black people as property, not allowing women to vote, and segregation.

Because “majority vote has been dead wrong,” you concluded that “our system has to be based on a deeper set of principles, and [you] submit [] that that’s God the creator.” You believe that “there’s no such thing as an ideal godless America” and that “we need to stand very vigorously in favor of our individual rights and liberties, in favor of a God-based country.”

You also commented that it is “sinister to force people to get a vaccine” in regards to national mandates. You erroneously stated that 10-40 percent of healthcare workers are refusing to get vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> We do appreciate, however, that you indicate that you are vaccinated.

FFRF agrees that individual rights and liberties must be vigorously defended. Religious liberty is one of America’s greatest achievements and that liberty is guaranteed by our secular government. Our nation is, in fact, founded on a godless and entirely secular Constitution, whose only references to religion in government are exclusionary, such as “no religious test shall ever be required” for public office. U.S. Const. art. VI. The United States was first among nations to

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Muoio, “How many employees have hospitals lost to vaccine mandates? Here are the numbers so far,” *Fierce Healthcare* (Jan. 5, 2022) at <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/hospitals/how-many-employees-have-hospitals-lost-to-vaccine-mandates-numbers-so-far>.

adopt a secular constitution, investing sovereignty in “We the People,” not a divine entity. A secular government is necessary for true religious freedom because freedom *of* religion cannot exist without a government that is free *from* religion.

In our nation, citizens can be any religion they like or none at all. Non-Christians and non-believers are not second-class citizens and our government and its representatives may not take sides on religious matters. You took an oath to defend our godless Constitution, whose First Amendment ensures not only that the government may not establish a religion, but also that public officials cannot impose their personal religious beliefs upon their constituents. Your comments show that you misunderstand how our Constitution protects individual religious freedom while seeking to violate those very protections.

The percentage of nonreligious Americans continues to rise and is now almost 30 percent.<sup>2</sup> Advocating for a “God-based country” sends a message to this increasing portion of the population ““that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.”” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly* 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). You swore an oath to uphold the Constitution and have a duty to govern for all Oklahomans, not just those who share your religious beliefs.

You also misunderstand the definition of “majority” in our nation’s history. We agree that there have been many times when America was “dead wrong.” The mistakes you attribute to the “majority” were, in fact, decisions made by a majority defined by exclusion. When Black people were not considered citizens, women were not allowed to vote, and segregation was deemed legal, the “majority” was elitist white men voting to perpetuate the facade. Unfortunately, your comments suggest that you would like to confine the new “majority” to Christian nationalists and would support this by re-writing the history of our founding.

“Majority rule” is not truly democratic without safeguards for personal and individual liberties. That safeguard in the U.S. Constitution is found in our Bill of Rights, which protects the minority from the tyranny of the majority.

You were elected attorney general, not preacher. Your oath of office has charged you with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not or do not share your personal religious beliefs. Your speech misrepresented the basis for our Constitution and its inherent protections for religious freedom, protections you violate when you promote your personal religious beliefs. We ask that you respect the First Amendment and stick to the secular.

Sincerely,



Karen M. Heineman  
*Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at [www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/](http://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/).