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On Monday, August 13th, an article was written regarding the debate and controversy surrounding a recent prayer made at a public event by commissioner Steve Sandlin. The Constitutionality of this public prayer was mentioned several times within this article.

The legal principles on which our country was founded are very specific. Though rooted in religious philosophies (most notably in Puritanism) the Constitution clearly calls for freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. Questioning the constitutionality of Christian prayers without subjecting atheist practices to the same scrutiny, seems to evidence a deeply held political bias. The purpose of this letter is to assert that individuals should maintain their right to religious freedom which allows them to offer public prayer as an act of free speech.

I support Commissioner Steven Sandlin's actions, and feel that he was well within his rights to offer a public prayer at the recent dedication of Stewart's Creek High school. Instead of offering the recommended moment of silence, Sandlin, as an alternative, spoke his prayer out-loud, setting a powerful precedent for the next generation. Mayor Burgess succinctly elucidated on my point by saying that "every citizen should have the right to prayer in a public manner and in a way that reflects his sincere beliefs about his relationship with his God" (Burgess, 2013). I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Commissioner Steve Sandlin, and those who follow his example. To pray publicly is to reject the zeitgeist which insists that practicing prayer publicly is a violation of the rights of others.

Public prayers were not an issue during the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, nor was our nation seemingly offended by the thousands of prayers offered up by elected officials and celebrities for the victims of 9/11. In fact, in the wake of 9/11 prayer walls sprung up all over New York City. Jewish Yeshiva students kept a solemn 24 hour watch over vans containing the remains of all the deceased, despite the victims' religious affiliations.

Even though Mayor Bloomberg banned prayer from the 9/11 memorial, scores of New York Churches opened their doors to the faithful- providing safety, warmth, and sanctuary in a time of crisis. Why then, should the dedication of a new building create such unnecessary controversy? Why is prayer acceptable during times of extreme national duress, but then unacceptable at events in which no blood has been shed? This dichotomy seems to represent a profoundly alleged partiality within the average American psyche.

The University president of Middle Tennessee State, Sydney McPhee opened a chapel for prayers in the wake of 9/11, without being the subject of such vitriolic criticism. The

president of the University specifically requested that Brother Tony Hutson of Middle Tennessee Baptist Church open their doors for the specific purpose of prayer.

President McPhee's request that Middle Tennessee Baptist Church be made available for prayer evidences his standpoint regarding the ability of prayer to provide catharsis, comfort, and emotional support. President McPhee saw a profound need within his student body that could be met only by the ministry of public prayer. Should we deny students this experience because some claim the material to be offensive? MTSU police also provided security for students through the involvement of Middle Tennessee Baptist Church. The joint efforts of church and state provided comfort and security to countless individuals in need.

There is no such scrutiny within our media regarding public celebrations of Ramadan. Textbooks now forbidden to teach Creationism are still allowed to teach Native American creation myths. Why should Christianity be singled out for criticism and exclusion?

Rather than targeting Commissioner Steven Sandlin for his remarks, he should be praised for safeguarding his right to free speech in the face of harsh criticism.

Sincerely,

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