



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 31, 2014

Maryland County Official Risks Jail, Prays in Jesus' Name

A government official in Carroll County, Maryland, said she is willing to go to jail rather than obey a federal judge's ban on sectarian prayers in the county's government meetings. On March 26 Federal Judge William Quarles, Jr. ruled that the Carroll County Board of Commissioners must cease opening its meetings with mostly Christian prayers offered in Jesus' name while a lawsuit over the prayers proceeds.



The American Humanist Association filed a complaint over the prayers in 2012, supposedly on behalf of a handful of the county's residents who were made uncomfortable by the monthly petitions for God's help. When the county board refused to stop the prayers, the atheist group filed suit.

On March 27 Carroll County Commissioner Robin Bartlett Frazier opened up the board's meeting by informing her fellow commissioners that she had no intention of following the judge's order. "I am willing to go to jail," said Frazier in comments which were videotaped. "If we cease to believe our rights came from God, we cease to be America. And we've been told to 'be careful,' but we're going to be careful all the way to communism ... and I say no to this ruling."

Frazier said that the ruling amounted to an infringement "on my First Amendment rights of free speech, and I think it is a wrong ruling."

She then proceeded to read a prayer that she said was uttered by President George Washington, explaining that it was a "good opportunity to demonstrate how our Founding Fathers and our leaders all throughout history upheld the idea that we are a nation based on biblical principles, one nation under God and we believe that is where our inalienable rights come from."

Frazier commenced with the prayer, which read in part: "Oh Lord our God, most mighty and merciful Father, I, thine unworthy creature and servant, do once more approach thy presence.... I beseech thee, for the sake of him in whom thou art well pleased, the Lord Jesus Christ, to admit me to render thee deserved thanks and praises for thy manifold mercies extended toward me.... Let the bright beams of thy light so shine into my heart, and enlighten my mind in understanding thy blessed word, that I may be enabled to perform thy will in all things, and effectually resist all temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.... Let thy blessings guide this day and forever through Jesus Christ in whose blessed form of prayer I conclude my weak petitions, Our Father."

The response from the American Humanist Association and the residents it supposedly represents was swift to Frazier's righteous defiance. The [Baltimore Sun](#) reported that Frazier's prayer "drew a written warning from the residents who sued the county to stop the prayers, which they say excludes people who don't share the commissioners' beliefs. In a letter to the board's lawyers, the plaintiffs said they would seek contempt charges if she did not back down."

One of the listed plaintiffs in the case, Neil Ridgely, charged that Frazier's defiance amounted to "demagoguery," complaining that the government official "put her personal beliefs before her responsibilities as a county official, insulted the judge, and every Carroll citizen who dares to have a



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religious belief that is different than her own.”

In a written statement Monica Miller, an attorney for the American Humanist Association, said it was “entirely possible that the commissioner wishes to become a public martyr of sorts for Christianity, a celebrity upon whom religious sympathizers can bestow admiration and encouragement. If that’s the case, and if she therefore ignores both the court and this warning, she will no doubt get her wish.”

The county’s other commissioners released their own statement, saying that while they believed they had the right to continue with the forbidden prayers, they would respect “the judge’s position in our American legal system.” The board members insisted that they did not “discriminate against anyone based on their religious beliefs or non-beliefs,” and they believed that their customary use in public prayer of terms like “Lord of Lords, King of Kings, creator of planet Earth and the universe and our own creator” would pass legal muster.

In their statement the board of commissioners noted that the U.S. Supreme Court is set to rule on legislative prayer within the next few months, and they believed the High Court ruling would affirm the right of government officials to offer sectarian prayers, including those offered in Jesus’ name. “The only legislative prayer case ever decided by the United States Supreme Court, in 1983, allowed prayers in Jesus’ name at legislative meetings,” they recalled.

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