



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 6, 2010

National Day of Prayer Clouded by Controversy

Today is the National Day of Prayer, a day set aside for silent reflection and prayer in a variety of forms. However, this spiritual day has been clouded by the presence of various controversies, from a Wisconsin judge's ruling that it's unconstitutional to disinvite Reverend Billy Graham's evangelical son, Franklin Graham.



Last month, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb declared the National Day of Prayer to be unconstitutional, after a group of Wisconsin atheists at the Freedom From Religion Foundation challenged its constitutionality. Judge Crabb claimed, "It is because the nature of prayer is so personal and can have such a powerful effect on a community that the government may not use its authority to try to influence an individual's decision whether and when to pray."

The Obama administration has defended the day of prayer, arguing that it merely acknowledges the important role that religion plays in the lives of most Americans. "Prayer has been a sustaining way for many Americans of diverse faiths to express their most cherished beliefs, and thus we have long deemed it fitting and proper to publicly recognize the importance of prayer on this day across the Nation," President Obama stated in a proclamation. The Justice Department is in the process of appealing the ruling.

In her ruling, Judge Crabb declared that the National Day of Prayer should continue until the appeals are decided.

While the National Day of Prayer dates back to 1775 when the Continental Congress encouraged prayer from the colonists while they were building a nation, it was made official in 1952 by President Harry Truman, who signed it into law. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan established that the day of prayer would be celebrated on the first Thursday of May.

Though the day has roots dating back to the Founding Fathers, Judge Crabb defended her position by asserting that the day was only established after a speech given by Reverend Billy Graham, thereby proving that the day indicates a preference for a particular faith.

Ironically, Billy Graham is the father to Franklin Graham, the evangelist who acted as the honorary chair of the 2010 National Day of Prayer Task Force. Franklin Graham's recent public comments on the evils of the Islamic religion led the army to retract his invitation to preach at the Pentagon today. The army's decision has prompted public outcry, and a letter signed by 36 members of the House of Representatives asking Defense Secretary Robert Gates to reconsider.



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However, Graham has elected to be present outside of the Pentagon during the prayer services, announcing, "I don't have to be invited to a prayer service to pray for the men and women who serve this nation, who I'm so proud of. I want them to know I support them."

For the 59th anniversary of the National Day of Prayer, religious leaders and government officials are gathering to engage in prayer. The day ends with the close of the Bible reading marathon in Washington, D.C. that began on Wednesday.

In addition to Washington, D.C., cities across the country have prepared special events in honor of this spiritual day, including large group prayer sessions held in baseball fields and town squares.

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