

Atheist Bullying Tactics Fail as Prayer Prevails in the U.S. House

The D.C. District Court recently dismissed the lawsuit brought by Daniel Barker, an atheist and co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF), in his attempt to become a guest chaplain for an opening session of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Barker, who has publicly proclaimed his atheism but maintains ministerial credentials, applied to the House of Representatives to deliver a secular invocation in lieu of a prayer. His application was rejected, and he sued, claiming that the Supreme Court's decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, which had ruled permitting ministers to pray before legislative gatherings, requires his inclusion as a guest chaplain.

The D.C. District Court rejected FFRF's claims, stating that Barker's interpretation of the *Town of Greece* is flawed and does not require what he demanded. The legislative prayer practice of the House of Representatives is consistent with the decisions of the Supreme Court and the D.C. Circuit, as well as the Rules of the House.

Judge Rosemary Collyer stated that Barker could not piggyback on *Town of Greece* to demand that the House allow a "prayer" to what or whoever he wanted: "[C]ontrary to Mr. Barker's hopeful interpretation, *Town of Greece* did not reference atheists—who are, by definition, nontheists who do not believe in God or gods—but 'any minister or layman who wished to give [a prayer].'"

House Speaker Paul Ryan was named a defendant in Barker's suit and praised the ruling: "Since the first session of the

Continental Congress, our nation's legislature has opened with a prayer to God. Today, that tradition was upheld and the freedom to exercise religion was vindicated. The court rightfully dismissed the claims of an atheist that he had the right to deliver a secular invocation in place of the opening prayer. I am grateful that the People's House can continue to begin its work each day as we have for centuries: taking a moment to pray to God."

"For over 240 years, each session of the House of Representatives has opened in a prayer which seeks God's guidance," said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel. "Daniel Barker and the Freedom From Religion Foundation attempted and failed another bullying tactic to try and erase what America is founded upon: prayer to Almighty God. Our nation's legislature has opened with prayer since the very first session as a reflection of the faith of many people across America who also seek the Lord's guidance in their lives."

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