

God Is Moving On Capitol Hill

Amid a steady stream of godless governing in Washington, D.C., Virginia Rep. Randy Forbes sees a behind-the-scenes miracle: politicians uniting in prayer

The prayer to save America began in Room 219 on Capitol Hill.

In 2005, two years before the global economic crisis erupted, U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Va., went into Room 219—an ornate room with a fireplace adjacent to the floor of the House of Representatives—to pray for the nation.

Not long afterward, he was joined by other members of Congress inspired by his example: U.S. Reps. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala.; John Carter, R-Texas; and Mike McIntyre, D-N.C.

“When it started out, it was just me going in there to pray,” Forbes says. “And then it would be one, two or three other people. But today when you walk in there, it’s standing-room-only with individuals—Republicans and Democrats—praying for the country, praying that God would heal our land, but also praying for God’s wisdom, that we make the right decisions to govern this nation.”

Today, many of the more than 100 federal lawmakers who are members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus gather each Monday or Tuesday evening to pray in Room 219.

But this interdenominational prayer movement isn’t confined to one room in Washington, D.C. Amid an increasingly godless culture and government, Forbes’ efforts to call people—and particularly other politicians—back to the nation’s foundation of prayer has spread to state legislatures, city and county halls, schools, churches and other venues nationwide.

“Just as Nehemiah built a wall around Jerusalem, we want to build a wall of prayer around our nation’s capital,” says

McIntyre, who co-chairs the Congressional Prayer Caucus with Forbes. “We have asked individuals, families, fellowship groups, prayer groups, Sunday school classes, churches and other houses of faith to join us in prayer for our country. We have also asked them to pray that leaders at all levels—local, county, state and national—would have wisdom in their decisions.”

Currently, more than 6,000 individuals and groups nationwide have joined members of Congress in weekly prayers, says Lea Carawan, executive director of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization in Chesapeake, Va. Heeding the apostle Paul’s admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing,” many of these individuals and groups pray in designated five-minute increments to ensure round-the-clock prayer for the nation. Others pray in their small groups or Bible studies.

“We call them 219 Prayer Groups,” Carawan says. “These prayer caucuses formed because they heard about the impact the Congressional Prayer Caucus was having in protecting religious liberties and really reversing some of the destructive attacks by the anti-God groups.”

While citizens are praying with members of Congress through the Room 219 prayer initiative, state legislators nationwide are forming Legislative Prayer Caucuses, with 12 formed in state legislatures that network more than 350 legislators nationwide, Carawan says. These are patterned after the Congressional Prayer Caucus and dedicated to promoting prayer, protecting religious liberty and preserving the nation’s Judeo-Christian heritage.

A Return to God’s Name

Meanwhile, in a backlash against concerted efforts by various anti-theist organizations to remove God from every vestige of government and the public square, elected officials in more

than 300 cities and counties nationwide have voted over the last year to prominently display the national motto, "In God We Trust," in public buildings nationwide. Many public schools have joined the uprising as well, tacking "In God We Trust" posters on walls of classrooms.

This phenomenon follows the passage of a resolution Forbes brought in January 2011 to re-establish "In God We Trust" as the national motto and to encourage its display in public buildings and schools nationwide. Forbes introduced the resolution after the U.S. Supreme Court turned down an appeal filed by Sacramento, Calif., atheist Michael Newdow, who had challenged the constitutionality of the national motto in a series of lawsuits stretching over a decade.

The suits alleged the motto violated the freedom of religion clauses in the First Amendment. However, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed, ruling the motto isn't unconstitutional because it is ceremonial and patriotic in nature.

Brad Dacus, president of the Pacific Justice Institute, a Sacramento-based nonprofit legal defense organization that offers free help to any public agency facing a legal challenge, says the high court's order set in motion the wave of cities and counties now voting to return "In God We Trust" to public buildings and schools nationwide.

"When this 'In God We Trust' movement first began, many thought it would be a short burst of action and would quickly dissipate," Dacus says. "Actually, it's been quite the contrary. This movement has been building and building and building."

So far, Dacus says, no public bodies have faced any legal challenges—a phenomenon he attributes to the fact that the existing case law makes it "irrefutable" that posting "In God We Trust" is constitutional.

And these efforts have a practical outcome that hits close to home for many. Forbes shares the story of a friend in Congress whose daughter asked her mother what she should say on “Self-Esteem Day” at school, when asked why she was special: “Her mother looked at her and said, ‘Honey, you go back and tell your teacher that God made you, so you’re special.’ The little girl stepped back, put her hands up in the air and said, ‘Mommy, I can’t say “God” in school.’ This congressman broke down crying, realizing he had stepped back and not done anything and, as a result, his little girl in first grade feels she couldn’t even mention God in school.”

With resolve, Forbes continues: “If she has ‘In God We Trust’ up on the wall at that school ... she’s not going to be convinced that she can’t say ‘In God We Trust’ or that she can’t mention God in school anymore.”

A Reversal of Anti-God Efforts

The Room 219 prayer gatherings and the movement to display the national motto come as the nation’s Judeo-Christian traditions have come under intense attack in modern times. In recent decades, the Ten Commandments, the national motto, crosses on government seals and at veterans’ memorials, the National Day of Prayer, prayer in schools and Christmas nativity scenes have faced a deluge of legal challenges.

At first, this foray appeared innocuous and was often “disguised in the subtlety of political correctness,” Forbes says.

For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, in 2004, threatened to sue the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unless it removed a small cross from the county seal. The ACLU argued the cross was a government endorsement of Christianity that alienated people who aren’t Christians.

After the supervisors voted to remove the cross, the ACLU and

other organizations became emboldened, making similar threats to cities, counties, states and schools nationwide. In many cases, officials capitulated, preferring to remove a symbol of faith than face a lawsuit.

In the last few years, these groups, most notably the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), have aggressively stepped up this *blitzkrieg*.

Last year, the FFRF filed a lawsuit challenging the Internal Revenue Service's alleged "preferential treatment of churches in applying for and maintaining tax-exempt status." The organization also urged President Obama to "protect freedom of conscience by ending the unconstitutional" National Day of Prayer on May 2.

Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice, says organizations like the FFRF are pushing the boundaries. Their ultimate goal, he says, is to "make us a religious-free country," with their top priority "eradicating the Christian faith."

"I believe that people are becoming aware of the strategy to dismantle the apparatus that protects our freedoms and preserves our foundational principles," Carawan says. "These individuals and groups have been committed to removing God from America for decades, and people are now just starting to wake up and realize our foundational principles and religious freedoms are not as secure as they thought they were and that every generation has to fight to protect them."

A Reminder of God's Place

Throughout the nation's history, faith in God and prayer has played a vital role in strengthening the fabric of society, Carawan says. In addition, the nation was "birthed and sustained by a rich history of faith," Forbes says.

For instance, as early as 1606, the First Charter of

Virginia—a document sent from King James I to the Virginia Company—assigned land rights to colonists for the purpose of “propagating the Christian religion.”

In 1775, the Continental Congress called for a day of prayer as it began the process of forming a new nation. President Abraham Lincoln called on the nation to fast and pray at critical junctures during the Civil War.

Facing the Nazi advance on D-Day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Americans to join him in prayer “in this hour of great sacrifice.” In 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill establishing a National Day of Prayer. During the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy famously said, “The guiding principle and prayer of this nation has been, is now and ever shall be ‘In God We Trust.’”

During the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln addressed a war-torn nation, saying, “This Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Shortly afterward, Congress passed the Coinage Act of 1864, authorizing the secretary of the treasury to first inscribe “In God We Trust” on coins. In 1956, Congress voted to adopt “In God We Trust” as the national motto.

References to the nation’s reliance on God for its blessings are also found in the Mayflower Compact of 1620, the Declaration of Independence, the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem.

Speckled throughout the nation’s history, “In God We Trust” has guided America and provided a “foundation upon which we established our government,” Forbes says. In troubled times, he says, the U.S. has consistently looked toward that one simple truth for hope.

“Today, we face difficult times again,” Forbes told the House

of Representatives shortly before it voted 396-9 in November 2011 to reaffirm the national motto. "Many Americans feel their country slipping from their fingertips. And when they see 'In God We Trust' slipping from our history books and being removed from the center of our guiding principles, reaffirming that truth becomes important to them."

A Renewal of the Public Voice

In response to that vote, a growing number of Americans have mobilized to return the national motto to public buildings and schools nationwide.

One of the driving forces behind this campaign is Jacquie Sullivan, a city councilwoman in Bakersfield, Calif., and the founder of In God We Trust–America, Inc. After hearing about a group on the East Coast that was protesting the display of the words "In God We Trust" on a public building, Sullivan convinced her fellow councilmembers to vote, in 2002, to display the national motto in the council chambers of Bakersfield City Hall. In 2004, she founded the In God We Trust–America organization, which sends informative packets to elected officials.

Sullivan, along with many volunteers across the nation, now attends school board and government meetings to encourage officials to vote to display the national motto.

"We are doing great, but we need help," she says. "I need someone working in every state in our country."

Dee Wampler, a 72-year-old attorney in Springfield, Mo., who volunteers with Sullivan's organization, says he's helped convince officials in more than 80 cities and counties in Missouri and surrounding states to vote to display the national motto.

"I've been met with amazing success everywhere I've gone, with the exception of my hometown," says Wampler, the former

elected prosecuting attorney in Greene County and author of the book *The Myth of Separation Between Church and State*. "And now I'm working to defeat the city councilmen blocking the posting of the national motto."

Wampler says he's contacted 15 candidates running against these incumbents, all of whom say they are in favor of posting the national motto.

"I'm hoping for a change on the city council, and I'm not giving up," Wampler says. "Too many Christians give up. If the door is slammed in their face, they just go away, whereas the liberal groups keep coming back and coming back, filing more lawsuits and looking for favorable judges and venues. Too often, Christians are not aggressive enough. We just accept, 'No,' and go and pout. And so I'm going to fight. I'm going to draw a line in the sand. I'm not going to give up on Springfield."

In Tyler, Texas, Rosalie Howerton is taking a similar stand and has helped convince officials in 30 cities and counties to post the national motto.

"Psalm 33:12 says, 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,' but we're not looking so swift these days," Howerton says. "Our morals are not what they used to be. I'm 71. I lived through a time when the country really honored God."

But Howerton says she's encouraged by the elected officials and others across the nation who are praying for another Great Awakening and taking action to post "In God We Trust" posters in schools and public buildings nationwide.

"It's the only way this country is going to turn around—with people praying and hearts being changed," she says.

Troy Anderson was an award-winning reporter and editorial

writer at the Los Angeles Daily News, The Press-Enterprise and other newspapers for two decades. He currently writes for Reuters, Newsmax, Charisma and many other media outlets. He lives in Irvine, Calif. Learn more at .

Watch as Rep. Randy Forbes explains the origins of the congressional prayer meetings at