

Atheists Ask Obama to Remove God From Oath of Office

As President Barack Obama takes the oath of office for his second term on Jan. 21, a group of atheists is requesting he do so without a Bible and without mentioning "God."

Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation claims the Constitution does not contain the language "so help me God," nor does it require the use of a Bible.

"As FFRF has always done before presidential inaugurations, we are asking **President Obama** to honor the Constitution on Jan. 21 by omitting that religious verbiage from the oath of office," the group said in a statement.

FFRF sent the president a letter with their request, seen below.

Dear President Obama:

Congratulations on your re-election. I write to respectfully ask you to re-examine the use of religion as a political tool in your second term as president. The November election highlights the country's rapidly shifting demographics. The electorate's religious affiliation is changing more quickly than any other metric, including race. In 1990, 8 percent of Americans were nonreligious. When you were elected in 2008, 15 percent of Americans identified as nonreligious. Now that number is 20 percent.

More strikingly, 1-in-3 Americans under 30 now identify as nonreligious. This is the demographic that, by a wide margin, elected you in 2008 and again in 2012. It is the 30-and-unders who are our greatest supporters and are the future of this country. Their votes will decide future elections. More and more they are tired of leaders injecting religion into

politics.

The shifts towards marriage, sex, and race equality, and the acceptance of non-nuclear families all coincide with the secularization of America. For secular America, religious rhetoric is empty. Religious justifications for government action are hollow arguments invoking an authority that we reject. Politicians often use religion to pander to their base, but we find such rhetoric exclusionary and distasteful.

You called Nov. 5 "the last day that I will ever campaign." This term limitation is a gift. You are not beholden to any future constituency. This term is a chance to do something that no president in recent memory has done: reach out to secular Americans. In the past, that might have been politically costly. But this recent election shows that it will be politically costly not to reach out to secular America. We are the future. Use this second term to build a legacy by rejecting the way this country politicizes religion.

You can start on January 21. When you stand to reaffirm your oath, do so using the language of the Founders. Eliminate the religious verbiage. While you're at it, why not place your hand on the Constitution instead of a bible? The oath, laid out in Article 2, Section 1 of the Constitution, is secular (no hand on the bible, no "so help me God"): "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The "so help me God" tradition violates the Constitution in the act of promising to uphold it. The ritual alienates the demographic that elected officials must rely on in the coming years. It excludes the people that put you into office and runs against the wishes of the people that created your office. The Constitution does not mandate religious oaths; it prohibits them.

Use this term to create a legacy worthy of the Founders. Restore the presidential oath to its original form and begin the necessary process of divorcing American politics from religion.

I will never forget the lines of your first inaugural address, recognizing nonbelievers:

We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus – and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve, that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

The final tribal allegiance that must dissolve is not sex, or race, or sexual orientation. It is religion. Private citizens are free to maintain that allegiance if they choose, but it is time our government abandoned it. Please do not passively wait for a revelation of “our common humanity.” Lead us into that new era of peace and unity by separating politics from the division religion sows.

Start small. Start by honoring the secular intent of the oath. In its altered, religious form, the oath is a symbol of the disregard this country has shown for its Constitution in the name of God. Our once silent minority will no longer remain silent as politicians trample the document we hold sacred –the Constitution. Honor the oath as you recite it on January 21 and lead us into the new era you promised four years ago.

With hope,

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Freedom From Religion Foundation