

Defying Court, Maryland Official Opens With Prayer in the Name of Jesus

A county official in Maryland opened an official meeting on Thursday with a prayer referencing Jesus Christ, according to a person who attended the meeting and local media, two days after a federal judge issued an injunction prohibiting such a prayer.

Carroll County Commissioner Robin Bartlett Frazier began the group's budget meeting with a prayer she says was written by George Washington, the first U.S. president, that referred to Jesus Christ at least three times.

The budget meeting came two days after a U.S. District Court judge in Maryland issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the county commissioners from using "the name of a specific deity associated with any specific faith or belief."

The injunction was in response to a civil lawsuit filed last May on behalf of several Carroll County residents and the American Humanist Association, which claimed the practice violated the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which provides for a separation of church and state. Opening official government meetings with non-sectarian prayers is legal.

The legal question of how courts should weigh challenges to prayers made before public government meetings is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. That case, *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, concerns a challenge by local residents to sectarian prayers made before town meetings in the Rochester, New York, suburb of Greece. The high court is expected to issue a ruling by the end of June that will offer guidance to judges around the country.

Bruce Hake, a New Windsor, Md., immigration attorney and Roman Catholic who is one of the plaintiffs, attended Thursday's meeting.

"Commissioner Frazier spoke at length in brazen defiance of the federal judge's order," Hake said.

Frazier expressed a willingness to go to jail to fight the injunction, local media reported.

Frazier did not return calls seeking comment.

The legal arm of the American Humanist Association sent a letter of protest and warned they would ask the judge to find Frazier in contempt of court if she repeated the prayer.

"Government meetings are not a platform for government officials to promote their religious views," wrote Monica Miller, an attorney for the group. "We appreciate the commissioners' individual religious freedom ... we simply ask that they refrain from using the apparatus of government as a platform for their personal, sectarian religious views."

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