

This State's Constitution Actually Prohibits Pastors From Serving in the Legislature

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Did you know: there's a provision in the Tennessee Constitution banning ministers and preachers from serving in the state legislature? Yes, really.

Article eight of the document, which was first drafted in 1796, proclaims no ministers or priests can serve in either house of the legislature, WPLN radio reported.

Rather than a punishment or form of discrimination, the preclusion might have been codified, in part, to protect pastors and ministers from distraction—or so the language states. Preachers' jobs were seen as so vital that politics would be an impediment.

"Whereas the ministers of the gospel are by their professions, dedicated to God and the case of souls and ought not to be diverted from the great duties of their functions," the constitution reads. "Therefore no minister of the gospel, or priest of any denomination whatever shall be eligible to a Seat in either house of the Legislature."

Some historical narratives do explain, though, that the language, borrowed from England, had some roots in trying to keep various individuals in the clergy out of government. Methodists were one group, based on increased political engagement, that led some in Tennessee to keep the ban in place.

It's a complex history you can read more about [here](#).

Today, though, the ban holds no legal weight. That portion of the state constitution hasn't been enforced in 40 years. In fact, there are current members of the legislature who work as preachers.

Rep. Harold Love Jr. (D), Rep. Johnny Shaw (D) and Sen. Page Walley (R) are all reportedly ministers and all serve in their respective roles, according to WPLN.

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