Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2015

Dear Friend,

Each year for the past sixty-four years, the President has called the American people to a day united in prayer. We call it the National Day of Prayer, and this week, we will celebrate it once again. As a nation, we have faced many daunting challenges throughout our history, and have overcome them. We are optimistic about America's future because throughout her history, the prayers of our people have united and sustained us across impossible odds.

The first presidential call to prayer was issued by George Washington on October 3, 1789. He wrote, "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor." Since then, there have been over 130 presidential calls to prayer, and in 1952 President Harry Truman signed a law making the National Day of Prayer an annual event.

After the American Revolution, our nation's leaders were deeply divided over the way in which this new experiment in democracy should be governed. A first attempt at forming a civil structure under the Articles of Confederation was failing and a convention was called to address the problem.

Though they all had fought for the shared ideal of freedom in the Revolution, the delegates at the Constitutional Convention agreed very little about what structure of government would best preserve their hard-won freedom. Disagreements and bickering threatened to undermine the new nation almost as soon as it had begun. Amidst the controversy, Benjamin Franklin urged that the delegates appoint religious leaders to open each session with prayer. Franklin noted in his appeal that, during the war with Britain, they had prayed daily for protection, and yet in a time of peace they had forgotten the need to seek such protection and wisdom.

As our nation was on the verge of splitting in half in 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed a national day of prayer, that "the united cry of the nation will be heard on high and answered with blessings no less than the pardon of our national sins and the restoration of our now divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace."

On the eve of D-Day in 1944 as General Eisenhower and his troops carried out the perilous invasion of Normandy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt led the nation in prayer. He prayed, "As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts."

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Corporate prayer unifies by reminding us that, while we may disagree about what paths or policies will best continue to support and secure our freedoms, we must recognize where we have shared motivations to preserve that freedom. Despite our disagreements, we can be one voice, united in prayer as we strive to overcome the challenges that lie before us.

Opening legislative sessions with prayer is a tradition with a rich history in America dating back to a prayer given before the First Continental Congress on September 7, 1774. In keeping with a long-embraced and protected tradition, both chambers of the United States Congress—the House and Senate—begin their legislative sessions each day with a prayer. This prayer is offered either by the House or Senate Chaplain, or by a guest chaplain that has been nominated by a Member of Congress.

This rich tradition was recently reinforced by the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, and we encourage you to read for yourself the strong words of support that the Court had for this tradition.

For years, the town of Greece, New York, had opened its meetings in prayer. But in 2008, two local residents filed suit challenging the town's practice as unconstitutional. Even though people of all faiths or no faith were welcome to volunteer to give a prayer, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit held that the policy was unconstitutional because the prayers being offered were predominantly Christian. In response, eighty-five Members of the House of Representatives, thirty-four Senators, and the Department of Justice filed a friend of the court briefs defending the town and our Nation's long tradition of legislative prayer.

In its decision, the Supreme Court reversed the Second Circuit's opinion and concluded that what mattered was the inclusivity of the volunteer policy, and not the resulting theological variety of the prayers. Looking to the example of legislative prayer in Congress, the Court noted that Congress acknowledges our religious diversity by welcoming ministers of many creeds, not by regulating the content of the prayer. Once the government has invited public prayer, it must leave the prayer giver free to pray by his or her conscience.

This landmark decision from the Court affirmed two crucial truths. First, the Establishment Clause does not require the scrubbing of sectarian references or religious traditions from public view. The Court noted that "Our tradition assumes that adult citizens, firm in their own beliefs, can tolerate and perhaps appreciate a ceremonial prayer delivered by a person of a different faith."

Second, after decades of confusing and unworkable legal tests, the Court clearly acknowledged that the crucial question pertaining to the separation of church and state is whether or not an individual has been compelled by the government to hold a particular religious belief. The Court further wrote that "[o]ffense . . . does not equate to coercion. . . . [A]n Establishment Clause violation is not made out any time a person experiences a sense of affront from the expression of contrary religious views in a legislative forum."

We have faced challenges in the past. We are facing challenges now, and we will face them in the future. Yet we believe there is hope for America—that we have a bright future—if

we remember the greatness of our foundation. If we remember to pray. America has been made great through the prayers of her people, and she can remain so.

We hope that you will take the time to read the Court's decision in full, and that you are encouraged by the Court's strong affirmation of the rich tradition of legislative prayer. As Members of the United States Congress, we will continue to uphold this tradition on the floor of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

John A. Boehner
Speaker of the House

Congressman J. Randy Forbes (VA-04)
Co-Chair, Congressional Prayer Caucus

Senator James Lankford (OK)
Co-Chair, Congressional Prayer Caucus

Robert Aderholt (AL-04)
Member of Congress

Virginia Foxx (NC-05)
Member of Congress

Tim Walberg (MI-07)
Member of Congress

Vicky Hartzler (MO-04)
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson (SC-02)
Member of Congress

Rick Allen (GA-12)
Member of Congress

David Rouzer (NC-07)
Member of Congress

Mike Pompeo (KS-04)
Member of Congress

Randy Neugebauer (TX-19)
Member of Congress

Jeff Miller (FL-01)
Member of Congress

Brad Wenstrup (OH-02)
Member of Congress

Rob Wittman (VA-01)
Member of Congress

Robert Pittenger (NC-09)
Member of Congress

John Fleming (LA-04)
Member of Congress

Kristi Noem (SD-AL)
Member of Congress

Kevin Cramer (ND-AL)
Member of Congress

Rick Crawford (AR-01)
Member of Congress

Stephen Fincher (TN-08)
Member of Congress

Glenn Thompson (PA-05)
Member of Congress

Steve King (IA-04)
Member of Congress

Robert Latta (OH-05)
Member of Congress

Ralph Abraham (LA-05)
Member of Congress

Doug LaMalfa (CA-01)
Member of Congress

Tim Huelskamp (KS-01)
Member of Congress

Walter Jones (NC-03)
Member of Congress

Andy Harris, M.D. (MD-01)
Member of Congress

Daniel Webster (FL-10)
Member of Congress

Richard Nugent (FL-11)
Member of Congress

Dave Reichert (WA-08)
Member of Congress

Bill Posey (FL-08)
Member of Congress

Scott Rigell (VA-00)
Member of Congress

Doug Lamborn (CO-05)
Member of Congress

Peter Roskam (IL-06)
Member of Congress

Steve Stivers (OH-15)
Member of Congress

Joe Pitts (PA-16)
Member of Congress

Chuck Fleischmann (TN-03)
Member of Congress

Mark Walker (NC-06)
Member of Congress

Gregg Harper (MS-03)
Member of Congress

Blaine Luetkemeyer (MO-03)
Member of Congress

Dennis Ross (FL-15)
Member of Congress

Renee Ellmers (NC-02)
Member of Congress

Steve Pearce (NM-02)
Member of Congress

Jody Hice (GA-10)
Member of Congress

Blake Farenthold (TX-27)
Member of Congress

John Carter (TX-31)
Member of Congress

John Moolenaar (MI-04)
Member of Congress

John Ratcliffe (TX-04)
Member of Congress

Louie Gohmert (TX-01)
Member of Congress

Diane Black (TN-06)
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French Hill (AR-02)
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Brian Babin (TX-36)
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Randy Hultgren (IL-14)
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