

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson,

We write to express our profound concerns regarding the National Prayer Breakfast (NPB), its ties to the Fellowship Foundation, which previously ran the NPB, and the planned use of Statuary Hall for this sectarian event. As members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, we are steadfast in our commitment to the constitutional principles of religious freedom and church-state separation. We strive for the inclusive representation of all Americans, regardless of one's faith perspective.

The National Prayer Breakfast, scheduled for February 6, frames itself as a bipartisan event fostering unity. However, holding a government-run, taxpayer-funded Christian ceremony in the heart of the U.S. Capitol is an affront to the Establishment Clause and promotes division by excluding certain people while privileging others. The event's strong and continuous association with the controversial Fellowship Foundation also reveals a deeply troubling reality. Over the years, this event's sponsor and the event itself have been fundamentally at odds with the principles of equality, secular governance, and human rights:

1. **Anti-LGBTQI+ Advocacy:** The Fellowship Foundation has supported and maintained affiliations with individuals and groups promoting anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, including Uganda's infamous Anti-Homosexuality Act. This draconian law criminalizes advocating for LGBTQI+ rights and imposes the death penalty for LGBTQI+ people in certain situations. At Uganda's 2023 National Prayer Breakfast, which the Fellowship Foundation helped support, speakers championed the infamous "Kill the Gays" law. The Foundation's support for anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and conspicuous silence in condemning egregious human rights abuses is deeply troubling and incompatible with American values of dignity and equality under the law.
2. **Foreign Influence and Back Channels:** The National Prayer Breakfast has served as a conduit for foreign actors, such as convicted Russian agent Maria Butina, to establish backchannel communications with American officials. This history of exploitation endangers the integrity of our democratic processes and raises legitimate national security concerns.
3. **Undermining Church-State Separation:** The Supreme Court has held that government officials violate the First Amendment if they even appear to endorse religion(*See [Capitol Square Review and Advisory Bd. v. Pinette](#), 515 U.S. 753, 787 (1995); [Cty. of Allegheny v. Am. Civil Liberties Union Greater Pittsburgh Chapter](#), 492 U.S. 573, 593–94 (1989)*). Using the power and prestige of public office to promote sectarian religious events, such as the National Prayer Breakfast, violates the spirit and the law of this constitutional obligation.

4. **Inappropriate Use of Statuary Hall:** The potential use of Statuary Hall for this event compounds the abovementioned concerns. This historic space is a symbol of our secular democracy, and its utilization for a Christian religious ceremony undermines its significance. Such a choice risks alienating millions of Americans who practice other faiths or subscribe to secular philosophies not represented at this event.
5. **Intersection with Christian Nationalist Events:** The National Prayer Breakfast's alignment with two other religious events—the NPB Gathering (directly hosted by the Fellowship Foundation) and the National Day of Prayer and Repentance at the Museum of the Bible—further underscores its sectarian nature. These events, historically steeped in Christian nationalist and dominionist ideologies, feature figures with extremist views and agendas that prioritize one religious perspective over the pluralistic values of our nation. Last year's National Gathering for Prayer and Repentance [featured](#) prayers from individuals connected to the New Apostolic Reformation movement, whose followers [believe](#) Christians are called to control the government. The way these events have obviously been choreographed with the Breakfast amplifies our concerns about the erosion of the separation between church and state.

Recent efforts to rebrand the National Prayer Breakfast and dissociate it from the Fellowship Foundation have now been revealed as window dressing. [Investigative reporting](#) has repeatedly highlighted the ongoing connections between the Breakfast's leadership and the Fellowship Foundation, reinforcing our doubts about the event's purported neutrality. The National Prayer Breakfast also proclaims that “all faiths” are welcome while declaring that it is “gathering in the spirit of Jesus and calling on the Lord in prayer.” Please consider how practitioners of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism and other non-Christian faiths feel about being “welcome” to attend an explicitly Christian government-sponsored church service where their only role is to listen. This exaltation of Christian privilege divides America along religious lines and flouts the equality our Constitution enshrines.

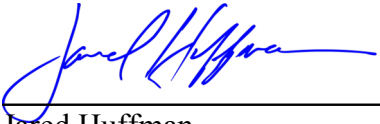
Given these significant concerns, we urge you to:

1. Reconsider the use of Statuary Hall or any other official government space as a venue for events associated with the National Prayer Breakfast, Fellowship Foundation, or affiliated organizations;
2. Ensure that Congress refrains from appearing to endorse sectarian activities, consistent with its constitutional obligations; and
3. Demand transparency regarding the event's organizers, sponsors, and objectives to reassure the American people of Congress' commitment to secular governance.

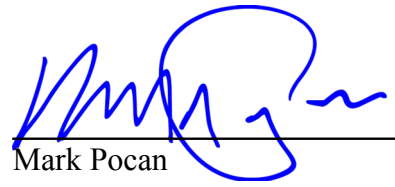
As Speaker, you bear the responsibility of safeguarding the dignity and integrity of this institution, ensuring that it respects the Constitution and reflects the pluralism of the American people. To that end, Congress should reaffirm the great American tradition of separation of church and state by disassociating from the National Prayer Breakfast.

We urge you to consider these concerns and take appropriate action to address the constitutional, ethical, and human rights issues associated with the National Prayer Breakfast and its sponsors. Upholding religious freedom for all means ensuring the government does not promote or denigrate religion or lack thereof. We look forward to your response and stand ready to collaborate in upholding the principles of secular democracy and the rights of all Americans.

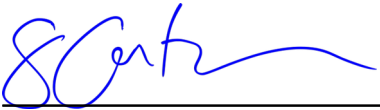
Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress