CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNAL OPERATIONS

Mayor Tim Grayson, Chair
Laura Hoffmeister, Committee Member

5:30 p.m.
Monday, January 12, 2015

Building A, Garden Conference Room
1950 Parkside Drive, Concord

ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

1. **DISCUSSION –** Consideration of Prayer/Inspirational Moment at City Council Meetings. Report by Mark Coon, City Attorney.

2. **ADJOURNMENT**

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Distribution: City Council
Valerie Barone, City Manager
Mark Coon, City Attorney
Joelle Fockler, City Clerk
Administrative Services

AGENDA ITEM NO._____

REPORT TO COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
POLICY DEVELOPMENT & INTERNAL OPERATIONS

TO HONORABLE COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

DATE: January 12, 2015

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF PRAYER/INSPIRATIONAL MOMENT AT CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Report in Brief

In May, 2014 the United States Supreme Court addressed the issue of prayer before legislative meetings in a case called *Town of Greece, New York v. Galloway.* In its decision, the court held that the Greece Town Board's practice of commencing meetings with a short prayer does not violate the First Amendment's "Establishment Clause," which prohibits government at any level from establishing religion or preferring one religion over another. Following the issuance of the *Town of Greece* decision, Councilmember Dan Helix requested that the Policy Development and Internal Operations (PD&IO) Council Committee consider (for potential review by the full Council) establishing a short period for prayer or a moment of inspiration at the beginning of Council meetings.

On July 14, 2014, the PD&IO Council Committee (Mayor Grayson and Councilmember Leone) met to evaluate Councilmember Helix's proposal. Prior to that meeting, the Committee received three items of written correspondence opposing the proposal (see attachments to this report). At the July 14 meeting, both Mayor Grayson and Councilmember Leone requested that staff research in-depth various issues related to this proposal and report back to the Committee. This report comprises staff's review and findings as to the issues identified by the Committee.

Discussion

a. The Town of Greece Decision

As noted above, in the *Town of Greece* decision, the Supreme Court held that the First Amendment's Establishment Clause is not violated by the practice of conducting a prayer or an inspirational presentation prior to the meeting of a legislative body. In particular, the court noted that although legislative prayer is religious in nature, the practice has long been viewed as compatible with the Establishment Clause and is part of the historical fabric of the United States. Indeed, a brief prayer has been given at the opening of each Congressional session since the framing of the Constitution. The court noted in *Town of Greece* that legislative prayer lends gravity to public business, reminds lawmakers to transcend differences in pursuit of a higher purpose, and expresses the common desire for a just and peaceful society.

Importantly, the court in T*own of Greece* held that invocations need not be secular, and they may make direct reference to specific deities such as Jesus, Allah and Jehovah. On the other hand, legislative bodies are prohibited from prescribing the prayer to be recited, nor may one religion be favored over another in delivering the prayer. Moreover, the invocation cannot denigrate nonbelievers or religious minorities, mandate participation in the prayer (such as asking the audience to bow their heads), or preach conversion. By the same token, the legislative body may not indicate that its decisions might be influenced by a person's acquiescence in the prayer opportunity.

Of critical importance, the Court in *Town of Greece* held that a legislative body which permits a moment of prayer/inspiration must make a reasonable attempt to identify all congregations and faiths located within its borders and provide each with the opportunity to participate. The obvious reason for this requirement is to avoid the appearance that the legislative body is favoring one religion or creed over another.

b. Council Committee Questions

During the July 14, 2014 PD&IO Council Committee hearing, Mayor Grayson and Councilmember Leone collectively posed a number of questions regarding this proposal, which are addressed in the remaining portion of this staff report.

i. Concord's Prior History of Prayer at Council Meetings.

Research indicates that during a four or five year period in the 1970s, prayer and brief inspirational messages were conducted at the opening of Council meetings. Apparently the practice was discontinued because attempting to fairly allocate the prayer-giving opportunity among the various religions and faiths within the community was onerous for staff. Apparently there was also public criticism that some faiths and religions were being favored over others, and that other faiths or sects were being excluded entirely. This discord overshadowed the very reason for having prayer in the first place— the desire to foster harmony and unity.

ii. Legislative Prayer in other Cities

Even prior to the Supreme Court decision in *Town of Galloway,* a number of cities in California were permitting prayer or a moment of silence prior to Council meetings. As of December 2014, approximately 80 of the 482 cities within the state were following this practice in one form or another. In researching this report, the City Attorney spoke with counterparts in those cities that do conduct a prayer/moment of silence before City Council meetings. A majority of the City Attorneys who provided feedback indicated that the process of selecting participants is time-consuming, and many expressed that the practice has triggered criticism from representatives of certain faiths who believe that they are not given the same opportunity as more mainstream religions. On the other hand, some City Attorneys reported that the process has been relatively smooth and harmonious, achieving the desired unifying effect. Surprisingly, notwithstanding the stark contrast in the feedback received from the various cities which staff polled, the selection process followed by those cities— detailed in the following section of this report— was fairly uniform.

iii. Suggested Guidelines if a Moment of Prayer/Inspiration is Adopted

If the City of Concord were to adopt a moment of prayer/inspiration, staff recommends establishing the following guidelines in order to minimize the likelihood of a successful legal challenge. It should be noted that many of these guidelines are followed by those cities which currently permit a moment of prayer/inspiration (collectively referred to as "prayer") at Council meetings.

- The prayer should be given at the beginning of the Council meeting when other ceremonial matters are conducted, such as the Pledge of Allegiance and the awarding of proclamations. This practice serves to separate the prayer from the legislative portion of the meeting, so that any appearance of coercion is minimized.

- The public should not be required to participate in the prayer in any form. Thus sufficient time should be given for those want to step outside during this period and to return thereafter. By the same token, non-participants should not be singled out by the prayer giver in an attempt to force participation, such as waiting until all members in the audience stand or bow their heads before the prayer commences.

- Since the historical purpose of legislative prayer was to lend gravity to public business and to remind lawmakers to pursue a higher purpose in their decision-making, the prayer giver should face the City Council and not the public when the prayer is given. This practice also minimizes the likelihood that members of the public will feel pressure to participate.

- Members of the public, during public comment, should be allowed to speak in opposition to the prayer being given.

- All faiths should be invited to give a prayer regardless of their religious affiliation, and the City should publicize the opportunity for the public to participate, whether on the City's website or some other forum. Additionally, it would be advisable for the City Clerk to compile and maintain a database of all religious congregations with an established presence in Concord. The congregations list might be compiled by referencing the listing for "churches," "congregations," or other religious assemblies in the annual Yellow Pages phone book published for the City of Concord. Further, any religious congregation or faith should be permitted to request inclusion on the list, by notifying the City Clerk. On an established date during the year, the City Clerk would mail an invitation addressed to the "religious leader" of each congregation inviting their religious leader to "voluntarily offer a prayer or an inspirational moment before the beginning of a City Council meeting, for the benefit and blessing of the City Council." Thereafter, respondents to the invitation would be scheduled on a first-come, first served or other random basis to deliver the prayers. No invocational speaker would receive compensation for his or her service.

- Prayer givers should not be allowed to denigrate other religions or proselytize their own faith during the prayer.

- The content of the prayer to be delivered should not be subject to City Council review or approval prior to it being given.

- To assist in the efficient administration of the meeting itself, the prayer should be limited to three minutes, similar to the maximum time allowed for speakers during Public Comment Period. The official actions taken by an individual councilmember or the body itself may not be affected in any way by a member of the public's participation, or lack thereof, in the prayer.

It should be noted that the City Council may want to adopt other guidelines in addition to those suggested above.

iv. Use of Volunteers

One of the questions posed at the July 14, 2014 PD&IO Council Committee meeting was whether the City could utilize volunteers to perform the selection process. Although this practice would be legally permissible, staff advises against it, since the selection process standard must be rigorously and consistently followed, and this standard is more likely to be successfully achieved if the role is assigned to a permanent staff member, such as the City Clerk.

v. Facilitation of a Private Prayer Gathering Before Council Meetings.

One suggested alternative to a prayer conducted in the City Council Chambers during Council meetings is to have the prayer meeting conducted elsewhere at the Civic Center, presumably on the same nights that City Council meetings occur. If the City were to permit this practice, however, the prayer would need to be conducted outside, for if the City allowed prayer participants to utilize an indoor conference room it would be exposed to a legal challenge. Specifically, the argument could be made that because the City does not routinely provide conference rooms or similar facilities for non-religious purposes prior to Council meetings, it cannot favor groups who wish to conduct a prayer by offering only them the use of such facilities. Alternatively, the City could provide meeting rooms for purposes other than prayer—although adoption of this practice likely would present an administrative challenge.

Public Contact

Posting of the Council Committee agenda.

Recommendation for Action

Staff recommends that the PD&IO Council Committee consider the various administrative and legal issues that adoption of a moment of prayer would entail, and determine whether to bring this proposal to the full Council for consideration.

Reviewed by:

Valerie Barone
City Manager
Valerie.Barone@cityofconcord.org

Prepared by: Mark S. Coon
City Attorney
Mark.Coon@cityofconcord.org

Attachments: Attachment 1: Correspondence from July 14, 2014 PD&IO Council Committee Meeting (three items)
Attachment 2: Additional correspondence received

Attachment 1: Correspondence from July 14, 2014 PD&IO Council Committee Meeting (three items)

PD+IO
09/14/14
Benched Item 1

Memorandum
Council Prayer/Inspirational Moment/Thought of the Day
July 2014

Is leading the council and assembly in prayer necessary?

No.

Currently we have a period of 3 minutes allowed to anyone for anything that is not on the Agenda. If someone wants to come up and try to lead us in prayer, bless or curse us from their spiritual perspective, they have unrestricted use of their time.

For the city to establish a specific agenda item for Prayer and its variations in political disguise only accomplishes to pull the government into a structured method of doing something that has worked quite well without it.

It should be noted that we already have "One Nation under God" in our opening ceremony would we want to cause some confusion when say a Hindu polytheistic prayer is given?

Is the alternative wording: Inspirational Moment necessary?

No.

Does the Council need more inspiration than pledging their allegiance "with liberty and justice for all"? Is the Council and our assembled public in some sort of induced prozac trance that it needs a shot in the arm with an inspirational moment? I think not.

Is the Thought of the Day necessary?

No.

The placing of a thought of the day on an agenda could open an interesting Brown Act situation. If the Thought of the Day is say fairness in wage parity. Could then it be stated that the Council could take action on that thought since it is an item listed on the agenda. Leaving the Thought unspecified opens things up even more. Further, if someone wants us to consider something as an example to provide an interesting 'thought', then again I remind the Committee that nothing stops anyone from sharing their thoughts within the public comment period.

Is it clear what the mechanism is to choose the 'prayer' or its politically corrected versions?

No.

It would be unacceptable for the Mayor to unilaterally declare what the prayer would come from or be. So this would be assigned to a 'committee'. And who appoints people to this committee?

And what is the mechanism for the spiritual 'rotation' as implied amongst the various denominations? Are we to have the committee decide what is Christian, what is Islamic, what is in fact religion? Having sat in a pub in Northern Ireland while Catholics and Protestants bombed and shot each other around me, or having been in Saudi Arabia where Wahabbis and Shia did the same, do we want to go there? Further I understand that there are about a 100 different variations of Pentecostalism, so we could rotate around those versions for years. Are we to list all the variations of the religions of the world and their cults, sects and then randomly pick? What about all the other non-organized spiritual groups be them Wiccan, animists, or Jedi (an official religion in New Zealand)?

Is it and will it be clear what conditions would we establish on the expression of this prayer etc?

No.

Are we going to allow the use of props as part of the prayer, little furry animals to be sacrificed to the God(s) for our salvation, giant Westboro Baptist signs that God Hates Fags, or even the use of incense, snakes and assorted other spiritually inspirational paraphernalia some of which are heretical and may be downright blasphemous to most others. Would we establish a set of acceptable instructions to the audience, such as please face Mecca, Jerusalem, women must be on the left or those with their mensural cycles are not allowed to participate?

Are we stronger as a community for this?

No.

Putting before the Council a practice that is guaranteed to be someone's heresy without any offsetting gain is not wise. Furthermore, if there is a prevailing belief amongst the committee that such a practice may bring benefit to the community from their divinity, then would there not be great concern that either the other divinities would take retribution upon us, or having rotated the process to a different divinity that the one capable of benefiting the community would then take offense at the apparent duplicity of practice?

We are Concord.

The name of our City is Concord, derived in the spirit that we should live in concordance with one another in a spirit of not just tolerance but also of a single community united with liberty and justice for all. Introduction of government sponsored and directed prayer and its related disguised headings, does not strengthen the unity of the community, it provides a highlighting of a division that is unnecessary in its formation, its practice and its lack of benefit to the community.

Jim Edi Birsan

Nakamura, Mary

From: Bob Barnes <bob_barnes@msn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 02, 2014 4:12 PM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: Prayer or Inspirational Thought

PD+FO
07-14-14
Bench 2

Afternoon

I am unable to attend a City Council meeting until after October. Nor will I attend the July 14th meeting as I have a different commitment at that time.

Comments:

1. The City should not be promoting religious functions at a City meeting. Prayer is a religious function. Any inspirational thought that implies a religion should not be promoted.
2. How do you determine the scope of the religion in order to provide their slot on the agenda for any given City Council meeting?
3. How do you manage the cancellation of a City Council meeting, cancelled that religion's slot, and next available slot is some time in the future?
4. The City has a vast diversity of residents. That diversity may represent a very wide range of beliefs that may include "non-religious" or "non-standard religious" beliefs.
5. The City must facilitate the attendance of residents at any City meeting. The City must not place any "obstacle" that limits any residents attendance at a City function. A prayer may be a belief "obstacle".
6. I would expect that it may be illegal for the City to compensate City staff (understand City Council members are City staff) to promote any form of religious function.
7. Tim Grayson (a Minister) should not be a member of this group due to a very significant bias of his beliefs.
8. The two Council members should allocate this time on more pressing City business – budget shortfalls, benefit shortfalls, city service/maintenance, etc.

My statements do not reflect my views on religion. They reflect my views that government is "for the people" and not for the "select people" who support a specific set of views or beliefs. I, as a Concord resident, should not be required to listen to some religious or inspirational statement in order to participate in a City function.

Regards
Bob Barnes
3901 Dana Ct.
Concord 94519
925-348-6443 (cell)
Email: Bob_Barnes@msn.com

Nakamura, Mary

From: Barbara Farhner <farhnerb@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Sunday, June 29, 2014 9:57 AM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: Prayers at the city council meeting

PDOIO
07-14-14
Benched Item 3

I have heard that the city council is considering opening the council meetings with a rotating multi-denominational prayer. The fact that you are considering multiple denominations doesn't alter the separation of church and state rules our country is founded on.

Just don't go there. What are you THINKING??? Why don't you just have an informal coffee together after the meeting at Starbucks and have a good prayer for yourselves?

Barbara Farhner
Walnut Creek, Ca.

Attachment 2: Additional Correspondence Received

Nakamura, Mary

From: Sheila Hill <sheilahill65@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 22, 2014 3:49 PM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: Fwd: CITY OF CONCORD PRIORITY ISSUES

Honorable Mayor and Members of the Council:

As a long-time Concord resident and voter, I'm writing about a few issues of GREAT concern to me:

Lifetime Health Coverage for Councilmembers

I have never in my life heard of a job that offered lifetime health coverage after only five years of employment (especially a part time job)! This is ludicrous and the council that voted to give the council this perk should be ashamed to spend public money this way. I wonder how many community programs have been cut to afford this luxury to our city council members - and if there are any who will have the decency to refuse this ridiculous perk to improve the the city budget (especially those who already have medical - even lifetime medical - provided elsewhere, and also by pubic money coincidentally). Perhaps this could be a benefit pro-rated based on years of service, i.e. it would take twenty years to earn that benefit. Even military personnel don't get this generous offer, though they don't get to vote on their own benefits package.

Prayer at City Council Meetings

Please respect the separation of church and state and do not allow prayer at our government meetings as it is highly inappropriate. Regardless of your individual religious affiliations, they have no place at council meetings - and nor do mine. This is a very bad idea. Who will decide which religions to include/exclude - Christians, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, Pagans, Satanists - they all have every right to their religions, rituals and prayers, but they should not occur at U.S government meetings under any circumstance. There's a time and place for everything - and city council meetings are not the time and place to pray. There is already enough public debate over the inclusion of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, especially because it was not even a part of the original pledge and added much later. Do yourselves, and your successors, a favor, and let this contentious issue alone; surely the city has other important business to tend to.

Plastic Pollution Crises

All cities bordering Concord have taken local action to address this global crises (except one, and there is a common denominator) by passing a local ordinance to ban single use plastic bags - the old arguments about CEQA, litigation, germs in bags - are outdated. Martinez, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek have already joined the 112+ cities in California that have done something about this to protect our watersheds and wildlife. CONCORD CAN PASS A NON-BINDING RESOLUTION by 9/1 to reserve their right to pass an ordinance within the SB270 Preemption requirements - Lafayette and Danville are both doing it (yes, it might mean having a mini-meeting in August instead of taking the entire month off, which is what they are doing as part of their due diligence). I am confused as to how when one council member voiced support for this, others gave in to the one who spoke louder and said this was not a "priority issue" for Concord (but praying at meetings is?), how one council member now tells me "it's too late now" (not that we've been talking about it for months), and how the Mayor said the issue would not die when addressed by the council earlier this year, yet it was never addressed again. If there is a valid argument against reducing plastic pollution in Concord I hope you will share it with the community.

It's an election year and I'm so excited to see what's in store for us all in the future.

Sincerely,

Sheila Hill

Nakamura, Mary

From: Burt Bogardus <burt.bogardus@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Saturday, August 09, 2014 2:34 PM
To: Concord City Council
Cc: Concord City Council; Concord City Council; Concord City Council; Concord City Council
Subject: Prayers at City Council Meetings

Councilmember Helix:

It has come to my attention that you wish to introduce the practice of offering religious prayers at Concord City Council meetings.

Even though I am not a resident of Concord, I ask you most respectfully to abandon this effort, however well-meaning.

You may be encouraged by the recent U. S. Supreme Court decision that religious prayers at government meetings are constitutional. I remind you that this was a 5 to 4 decision, with the most conservative members of the court apparently feeling more allegiance to their personal religious beliefs than to the Constitution which they have sworn to uphold.

The decision certainly didn't satisfy the non-religious, currently (according to the Pew Foundation) about 20% of the U. S. population. It didn't satisfy members of minority religions, who felt excluded and discriminated against by the Christian prayers. And it certainly bothered the more liberal religious citizens, who regard the separation of religion and government as one of the cornerstones of American law. The First Amendment does more than protect religious institutions from government interference--it also protects American citizens from having religion forced upon us by the awesome power of government.

There is no shortage of places where people can pray--in their homes, their churches, and really, virtually anywhere else except within the limits of government, taxpayer-supported property. This should not be too much to ask.

Please recognize that this is a very divisive issue, regardless of the Supreme Court decision. I beg you to focus your attention on the matters for which you were elected--attending to the business of the City of Concord.

Respectfully,

Burt Bogardus
(Retired law enforcement officer)

PO Box 293
Danville, CA 94526

(925) 820-2347

burt.bogardus@sbcglobal.net

cc: Tim Grayson (Mayor)
Ron Leone (Vice Mayor)
Laura Hoffmeister (Councilmember)
Edi Birsan (Councilmember)

Nakamura, Mary

From: Chuck Henry <chuckhenry@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Monday, August 11, 2014 9:00 AM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: prayer

regarding the proposal by Dan Helix to have council meetings opened with a prayer, I would remind you all of what Jesus himself said on the subject:

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." (Matthew 6:6-8)

If Mr Helix (or anyone else for that matter) wishes to say a prayer and seek guidance when the council meetings start, by all means, do so, but as noted above it's not necessary to make it a public spectacle.

Thanks for your kind attention,

Chuck Henry

Take copies to
all Councilmembers

Jane A. Russell
3079 Diablo View Road
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

August 12, 2014

Mayor Tim Grayson
City of Concord
1950 Parkside Drive
Concord, CA 94519

Re: Proposal for Public Prayer

Dear Mayor Grayson,

It has come to my attention that Council Member Dan Helix has suggested that there be a prayer prior to Concord city council meetings. That is a very bad idea. While I am aware that the Supreme Court has ruled that such prayers are constitutional, I would assert that most citizens of Concord do not want city council time and energy taken up with religious activities. We have churches for religious activities; we have government for governing activities. There is no need to mix the two. Of course, if an individual council member or some other individual wants to engage in prayer during city council meetings, he or she is free to pray silently. There is nothing preventing such prayers. However, there is no reason whatsoever to have a formal and public prayer as part of the city council meeting. And there are good reasons to not do so.

According to a 2011 Gallup Poll, 38% of Californians identify as nonreligious. I could not find statistics relevant to Concord only, or to Contra Costa County only, but I think it is reasonable to conclude, based on the information that we do have, that there is a significant number of Concord residents who identify as nonreligious. I would suggest that they do not want their city council spending time on any kind of public religious activities, including public prayer. The council members were elected to make decisions relevant to the City of Concord. They were not elected to engage in public prayer. If they want to pray on their own time, they are free to do so.

I urge you to seriously consider the divisiveness of such a practice. Not only will there likely be dissent over this issue itself, but the logistics (who will lead such prayers; what will be allowed content) will require time and energy on the part of both council members and staff -- time better spent on city government. Please let folks exercise their religious freedom by visiting whatever church they wish to, or not. Please do not bring such a divisive practice into Concord's city government.

Sincerely,

Jane Russell

Jane Russell
Organizer
Contra Costa Atheists and Freethinkers

August 13, 2014

Re: Prayers in Council Meetings

Dear Council Members:

I have lived in Contra Costa County for the past 30 years. I am responding to an article I read about your desire to include prayer sessions at the beginning of your meetings.

I vehemently oppose this suggestion. As an atheist, I would find the prayers offensive. If you invite people from different religions to speak in the beginning of the meetings, you would also need to provide time for the atheist viewpoint. We are a strong segment of moral, law-abiding, intelligent, well-educated people, and it is time that our voices be heard.

I urge you not to practice religion in a governmental agency that has been created for other purposes. I appreciate your intention, but this is a bad idea that should never come to pass.

Sincerely,

Laurel Ross

Laurel Ross
1352 Hermine Ave.
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

RECEIVED
AUG 18 2014
CITY MGR'S. OFFICE

Nakamura, Mary

From: Sylvia Lundy <sylvialundy@aol.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 14, 2014 4:12 PM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: Audible Prayer in Publc Chambers during Concord City Council Meetings

Dear Councilmembers,

Pastor Tim Grayson already should have recused himself from using resources of his own or City employees' time and/or tax money to investigate or to condone prayer in public chambers during Concord City Council Meetings. Since he has not recused himself, I formally lodge a complaint and request that the other Councilpersons move to recuse him.

The issue is, as you know and as I will not further define for you, a constitutional one.

I would not object to those interested meeting at a designated place out on the City Hall lawn for a brief prayer before council meetings (so as not to delay the starting time of said meetings).

Yours most respectfully,

Sylvia Snell Lundy
4519 Concord Boulevard
Concord, CA 94521

Take copies to all Council members

27 August 2014

Dear Councilmember Helix:

I see that you are proposing to begin offering religious prayers at Concord City Council meetings.

I think this is the wrong decision for our democratic government. The American democracy was exceptional because it differed from the regimes of the Old World by its separation of religion from government. This allowed us to advance our science, economy, education and well being far above that of the religious regimes of the old world. Our freedom of and from religion was the virtue that attracted many of the greatest scientific minds from Europe to escape Hitler in the last century.

Now, many powerful religious interests are at work trying to turn back the clock and institute religious control of our government. This is highly divisive and will increase the bitter division that is developing between the religious and nonreligious of our country. As many as 70 million Americans are not affiliated with a religion in our country and resent being forced to observe religious practices they may not believe in. They have been very quiet because of the much greater number of believers who suppress and discriminate against them. Already, religious politicians in conservative areas are passing laws to prevent atheists from speaking at these invocations.

Without a sense of basic unity, our country will fail like all previous that have been torn by religious antagonism.

Even though I am not a resident of Concord and have only resided in California for a year, I appeal to your sense of democracy, fairness and unity to abandon this effort to impose religion on our citizens.

Respectfully,

Eric A. Stone, PhD
Professor Emeritus,
New York University School of Medicine

1606 Stanley Dollar Drive 2B
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

cc: Tim Grayson (Mayor)
Ron Leone (Vice Mayor)
Laura Hoffmeister (Councilmember)
Edi Birsan (Councilmember)

Griffin, Sue Anne

From: Kit M <sanfrankit@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 28, 2014 8:08 AM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: cc's for distribution please

Copies to: Ron Leone
Laura Hoffmeister
Edi Birsan

To: Councilman Helix and Mayor Grayson

I have read you are considering prayer at council meetings. **YIKES!** This is very disturbing in a country founded on **freedom OF and FROM** religion! Regardless of our upbringing and having religion rammed down our throats at an early age, millions of Americans do NOT believe in a god or other religious beliefs. Personally, the more I studied (academically, outside the church) the history of the making of Christianity, the farther away I got from it. I very much resent those who do not know anything except what the Bible and their church tells them preaching to me about what they believe is the truth!

One of our most precious freedoms in the United States of America is **SEPARATION of church and state**! Please honor that and respect those who do not share your thoughts.

Sincerely,

C. M. Miller

Take copies to all Council members

Griffin, Sue Anne

From: Kit M <sanfrankit@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 28, 2014 7:55 AM
To: Concord City Council
Subject: No Prayer in Government Meetings

To: Councilman Helix and Mayor Grayson

I have read you are considering prayer at council meetings. **YIKES!** This is very disturbing in a country founded on **freedom OF and FROM** religion! Regardless of our upbringing and having religion rammed down our throats at an early age, millions of Americans do NOT believe in a god or other religious beliefs. Personally, the more I studied (academically, outside the church) the history of the making of Christianity, the farther away I got from it. I very much resent those who do not know anything except what the Bible and their church tells them preaching to me about what they believe is the truth!

One of our most precious freedoms in the United States of America is **SEPARATION of church and state**! Please honor that and respect those who do not share your thoughts.

Sincerely,

C. M. Miller