

A RESOLUTION

1 Urging members of the House of Representatives who have the
2 opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a legislative
3 session to craft a prayer respectful of all religious
4 beliefs.

5 WHEREAS, William Penn believed that "no People can be truly
6 happy . . . if abridged of the freedom of their Consciences, as
7 to their Religious Profession and Worship" and, as a result,
8 drew people to Pennsylvania from diverse faiths who had suffered
9 because of restrictions based on their religious beliefs; and

10 WHEREAS, The membership of the House of Representatives
11 consists of men and women of diverse faiths and beliefs who
12 represent constituents who are Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs,
13 Muslims, Jews and Christians, and of many other religious
14 affiliations, as well as agnostics, humanists, atheists and
15 other nonbelievers; and

16 WHEREAS, On May 5, 2014, in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the
17 United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the town of
18 Greece, holding that the town's practice of beginning its town

1 board meetings with prayers does not violate the Establishment
2 Clause of the First Amendment; and

3 WHEREAS, Justice Kennedy wrote in his opinion that the
4 purposes of legislative prayer are "to lend gravity" to sessions
5 where "the fractious business of governing" will take place and
6 noted that legislature prayer should be "solemn and respectful
7 in tone"; and

8 WHEREAS, According to Justice Kennedy, legislative prayers
9 that are used as an opportunity to condemn or try to convert
10 people who are not members of a particular religion would not
11 comport with the Constitution; and

12 WHEREAS, The majority opinion in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*
13 implies that prayers may be impermissible if they "denigrate
14 nonbelievers or religious minorities, threaten damnation, or
15 preach conversion"; and

16 WHEREAS, A prayer that cites a particular religious belief as
17 "our only hope," that "we've lost sight of you, we've forgotten
18 you, God, in our country, and we're asking you to forgive us"
19 and that "every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess,"
20 is unnecessarily divisive and polarizing; and

21 WHEREAS, These statements were offered in prayer on Monday,
22 March 25, 2019, during a legislative session of the House of
23 Representatives, offending many members of the House of
24 Representatives and many guests of the members; and

25 WHEREAS, Several members of the House of Representatives
26 walked off the House floor in protest during the prayer; and

27 WHEREAS, A fire and brimstone prayer such as this epitomizes
28 religious intolerance; and

29 WHEREAS, Prayers offered before the House of Representatives
30 in the daily order of business should reflect mutual respect and

1 religious tolerance of our colleagues and constituents and not
2 intimidate, demean or degrade; therefore be it

3 RESOLVED, That members of the House of Representatives who
4 have the opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a
5 legislative session are urged to follow the request of Speaker
6 Turzai to "craft a prayer that is respectful of all religious
7 beliefs".