A RESOLUTION

Urger members of the House of Representatives who have the
opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a legislative
session to craft a prayer respectful of all religious
beliefs.

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

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

WHEREAS, On May 5, 2014, in Town of Greece v. Galloway, the
United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the town of
Greece, holding that the town's practice of beginning its town
board meetings with prayers does not violate the Establishment
Clause of the First Amendment; and
WHEREAS, Justice Kennedy wrote in his opinion that the
purposes of legislative prayer are "to lend gravity" to sessions
where "the fractious business of governing" will take place and
noted that legislature prayer should be "solemn and respectful
in tone"; and
WHEREAS, According to Justice Kennedy, legislative prayers
that are used as an opportunity to condemn or try to convert
people who are not members of a particular religion would not
comport with the Constitution; and
WHEREAS, The majority opinion in Town of Greece v. Galloway
implies that prayers may be impermissible if they "denigrate
nonbelievers or religious minorities, threaten damnation, or
preach conversion"; and
WHEREAS, A prayer that cites a particular religious belief as
"our only hope," that "we've lost sight of you, we've forgotten
you, God, in our country, and we're asking you to forgive us"
and that "every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess,
is unnecessarily divisive and polarizing; and
WHEREAS, These statements were offered in prayer on Monday,
March 25, 2019, during a legislative session of the House of
Representatives, offending many members of the House of
Representatives and many guests of the members; and
WHEREAS, Several members of the House of Representatives
walked off the House floor in protest during the prayer; and
WHEREAS, A fire and brimstone prayer such as this epitomizes
religious intolerance; and
WHEREAS, Prayers offered before the House of Representatives
in the daily order of business should reflect mutual respect and
religious tolerance of our colleagues and constituents and not
intimidate, demean or degrade; therefore be it
RESOLVED, That members of the House of Representatives who
have the opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a
legislative session are urged to follow the request of Speaker
Turzai to "craft a prayer that is respectful of all religious
beliefs".