



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

February 13, 2025

The Honorable Rep. Donald Longmuir
Chair, House Political Subdivisions Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismark, North Dakota 58505

Re: OPPOSE HCR 3020, Overt Violation of the Establishment Clause

Dear Chairperson Longmuir and Members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its constituents in North Dakota, writes in opposition to HCR 3020, a resolution that impermissibly establishes Christianity as the state religion. This is a flagrant violation of the North Dakota State Constitution, the Constitution of the United States, and the founding principles of our nation. We strongly urge you to reject this resolution.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building, and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America.

The First Amendment of the Constitution provides: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹ This single sentence — the very first in the Bill of Rights — contains two of the most important clauses in U.S. law: the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. The first protects religious entities from government interference by granting protections for all religious beliefs. The Establishment Clause protects the United States’ ability to operate as a neutral democratic body by prohibiting religious intrusion into institutions created to serve all Americans, regardless of their creed. Together, these clauses ensure pluralism can flourish in a country filled with diverse religious and nonreligious beliefs. Our secular Constitution is unique in history — a revolutionary departure from the Church of England — and our founding father’s commitment to safeguarding religious freedom for all is one of the most fundamentally American ideals.

HCR 3020 completely disregards the long history and tradition of religious pluralism in America by asking North Dakota to “acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus Christ” and recognize the “Almighty God as the source of authority” within the state. This is an overt attempt to establish a state religion and

¹ U.S. Const. amend. I.

AMERICAN ATHEISTS

225 Cristiani Street • Cranford, NJ 07016-3214
(908) 276-7300 • www.atheists.org

a clear violation of the First Amendment. HCR 3020 would explicitly elevate Christianity above all other religious and nonreligious beliefs. The consequences of approving such a blatantly unconstitutional resolution would be devastating. The establishment of a religion by the state of North Dakota would open the door to discrimination against non-Christians and non-believers. Every person in North Dakota would feel compelled to conform their beliefs to those the government endorses, infringing upon their fundamental rights to freely exercise their religion and enjoy full and equal rights of conscience. Others would feel the need to hide their sincerely held beliefs and nonbelief to avoid negative treatment, in violation of their freedom of speech. Private and public employees would feel compelled to endorse the state religion out of fear for their livelihoods. Non-Christian churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples would become targets for hate crimes by those who believe the government-sponsored religion should be the *only* religion in North Dakota. Religious pluralism would no longer be celebrated but oppressed..

HCR 3020 is an unconstitutional and un-American resolution that seeks to turn North Dakota into a theocratic state in direct violation of the Establishment Clause. No one should be discriminated against for their beliefs, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, or nonreligious, nor should they feel compelled to publicly profess adherence to a government-mandated religion to avoid ostracization and hate within their community. We strongly urge you to protect all North Dakotans rights by rejecting this resolution.

Should you have any questions regarding American Atheists' opposition to HCR 3020, please contact me at vanderson@atheists.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Victoria" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Anderson".

Victoria Anderson
State Policy Counsel
American Atheists