



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 3, 2012

Colo. Cities Disregard Atheist Group, Keep Prayer at City Meetings

A pair of Colorado cities have decided to disregard the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) over the atheist group's demand that the cities' government meetings drop their customary opening prayers. As reported by Pueblo's [Chieftain](#) newspaper, the city council of Pueblo had originally caved in to the FFRF's demands, dropping the traditional invocation in favor of a moment of silence.



But Pueblo's city council president, Chris Kaufman, said that while the prayer might still be ditched, as of now the "council's own rules and bylaws call for an invocation," reported the *Chieftain*. "In short, it would take a majority of council to vote to stop the official prayer and that doesn't appear likely."

Meanwhile, some of the council members would apparently like to stare down the FFRF. "In fact, I'd like to expand the invocation to our weekly work sessions as well," Councilman Chris Nicoll, told the paper. "Congress and the General Assembly have prayers before they begin each session, and I'd like to follow those guidelines."

Meanwhile, the city council of another community, Colorado Springs, has decided to keep its opening prayer. Even as Pueblo officials were wrestling over their response to the atheist assault, Colorado Springs' council president, Jan Martin, issued a statement saying, "The inclusiveness of our invocations is designed specifically to be respectful of the religious freedoms of our community. We welcome the diversity of invocations at our meetings and we find the few minutes taken before our meetings sets a very thoughtful and respectful tone."

Vicki Gomes, a spokeswoman for the Colorado Springs City Council, explained that the community has enjoyed a long tradition of prayers at government meetings. "Invocation prayers and/or well wishes for the community have occurred at the City of Colorado Springs City Council meetings for more than 35 years," Gomes told the [Christian Post](#). She added that a wide variety of clergy and other individuals have been invited to pray. "[We] strive to include all types of religions, faiths, churches, and denominations," she told the *Post*, adding that "we encourage people who are interested in giving the invocation and/or well wishes for the community to call us."

Gomes noted that four years ago, "Rich Breidenbach, an atheist and board member of the Freethinkers of Colorado Springs, delivered the invocation and was quoted in a *Colorado Springs Gazette* article ... as stating that he welcomed the invitation and opportunity to speak."

The city of Pueblo had originally capitulated to the demands of the FFRF, whose staff attorney Andrew Seidel insisted that "local government should not be in the business of performing religious rituals, or exhorting all citizens, regardless of beliefs, to participate in a Christian prayer, or even asking citizens to show deference or obeisance to this ritual."

By contrast, Colorado Springs residents strongly encouraged its city council to stand firm against the atheist group. "As its name implies, this confused organization believes we have government-protected



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freedom from religion in addition to our freedom to pick and choose religious beliefs or to ignore and avoid them all,” wrote Wayne Laugesen, editorial page editor of the *Colorado Springs Gazette*. Laugesen noted that while “we have a right to shun religion, we do not have a right to government protection from the sights and sounds of religion in public — even on government property.” He added that “one might expect Pueblo politicians to ignore the foundation’s threat. Instead, they fell over without putting up a fight. We expect a more vigorous defense of our most basic freedoms — religious liberty and free speech.”

NBC’s Colorado Springs affiliate, [KOAA](#), quoted a number of city council members who support the prayers. “To me the power of prayer is astronomical and I totally support prayer,” said Councilwoman Eva Montoya. Councilman Steve Nawrocki emphasized that he would like the prayers to be as “diplomatic and all-encompassing as possible, and maybe that’s not possible, but that’s where I’d like to start from.”

Colorado Springs is the home of many evangelical Christian organizations, including Focus on the Family.

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