



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 9, 2014

Humanist Group Demands County Officials Be Fined for Praying

A humanist group attempting to silence government officials in Carroll County, Maryland, from praying in Jesus' name is demanding that the federal government step in with hefty fines.

As reported earlier in [The New American](#), on March 26 Federal Judge William Quarles, Jr. ruled that the Carroll County Board of Commissioners must cease opening its meetings with mostly Christian prayers offered in Jesus' name while a lawsuit over the prayers proceeds.



The lawsuit was filed by the American Humanist Association (AHA) on behalf of a group of Carroll County residents allegedly upset by the commission's tradition of opening meetings with mostly Christian prayers.

The day after the judge made his ruling, Carroll County Commissioner Robin Bartlett Frazier told her fellow board members that she was "willing to go to jail" rather than obey the unconstitutional federal edict. "If we cease to believe our rights came from God, we cease to be America," Frazier said. "And we've been told to 'be careful,' but we're going to be careful all the way to communism ... and I say no to this ruling."

The humanist group threatened to seek contempt charges against the commissioners if they continued to defy the injunction by offering sectarian prayers. A few days later, on April 1, the county commission responded by opening its meeting with a non-sectarian prayer, but then invited a local resident to step the microphone, where he proceeded to once again defy the injunction with Christian rhetoric and prayers.

In a press release, the AHA complained that Bruce Holstein, "reportedly the campaign manager of one of the commissioners ... read a statement that was harshly critical of the court order, even saying that he was 'overruling' the federal court, then ended his speech with a prayer that expressly referenced Jesus Christ." Most galling to the atheist group was that "at no time did the commissioners interrupt or attempt to stop Mr. Holstein's speech and prayer."

According to the *Carroll County Times*, two days later, on April 3, a trio of county residents used the public comments time of the county commission meeting to express their support for sectarian prayers — and to pray in Jesus' name. "Michelle Jefferson, Bob Kurland, and Westminster Councilman Paul Whitson spoke during the public comment portion of the board's [April 3] morning meeting," the paper reported. "The trio quoted the U.S. Constitution, offered Christian prayers, and spoke out against the preliminary injunction filed by U.S. District Court of Maryland Judge William D. Quarles Jr. last week."

Representative of the comments were those offered by Jefferson, who told the assembled commissioners: "I know you guys can't come out and say what this truly is, but as a citizen I can: This is



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a witch hunt, plain and simple. I pray that you guys find the strength and God give you the courage, and all of us the courage and the strength, to stand tall and proud of who we are as Americans and as Christians. And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

The repeated Christian prayers in the commission meetings prompted the AHA to file a [contempt of court request](#), including demands of a \$30,000 fine for the recorded violations, along with \$10,000 for each subsequent utterance of a prayer in Jesus' name.

"We regret this action had to be taken, but the commissioners have now broken the law twice," complained Monica Miller, an AHA attorney. "We thought Commissioner Frazier's recitation of a sectarian prayer was a one-time incident. It's now clear that she and the other Carroll County commissioners insist on continuing the practice of sectarian prayers at board meeting regardless of the court order."

On April 8 the Carroll County commissioners decided to keep the fight in the court, voting 3-2 to temporarily suspend sectarian prayers in their meetings until the court case has been decided.

The *Carroll County Times* reported that "while all prayers will now be nonsectarian, they may include references to 'God,' 'Lord God,' 'Creator,' 'the Almighty,' 'God of Abraham,' 'Heavenly Father,' 'Lord, our Governor,' 'Mighty God,' 'Lord of Lords,' 'Creator of the Earth,' and 'Our Creator.'"

Commissioner Richard Rothschild, one of two officials voting against the resolution, complained that "in my judgment, this resolution asked me to refuse to acknowledge the Son of God.... If I tell someone they can pray, but I forced them to pray only in a way that is acceptable to someone of another religion, then, in effect, I am prohibiting them from praying in a way that [does not] violate their true conscious and beliefs. Censorship is not freedom."



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