



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 8, 2011

## Tens of Thousand Join Texas Governor in Prayer for America

Ignoring accusations that the event was little more than a political maneuver designed to endear him to the Evangelical Right in an as-yet unannounced presidential bid, Perry stood before an estimated 30,000 participants in [The Response: A Call to Prayer for a Nation in Crisis](#), declaring: "Like all of you, I love this country deeply. Thank you all for being here." In his 10-minute prayer, Perry beseeched God, saying, "Father, our heart breaks for America. We see fear in the marketplace. We see anger in the halls of government and as a nation, we have forgotten who made us, who protects us, blesses us ... we cry out for your forgiveness."



As reported by the [Christian Post](#), "Part of the Texas governor's prayer was for people who had been impacted by the economic downturn. 'Our hearts do break for those who suffer, those afflicted by the loss of loved ones, the pain of addiction, the strife that they may find at home — those who have lost jobs, who have lost their homes, people who have lost hope,'" Perry prayed. The Governor encouraged participants to persevere in prayer for America, and asked them to pray for the President — though studiously avoiding mention of the name Barack Obama.

While Perry had invited the Governors of the 49 other states to join him at the event, only Sam Brownback of Kansas was personally present, offering his own prayer for the nation: "Loving God, forgive us our many sins: for being judgmental, unloving, focused on ourselves, lacking in mercy, hypocritical. We are sinful and flawed; use us anyway, by and for your glory and purposes that we may all live quiet and peaceful lives. We need you. America needs you. I pray this in your name."

As the faithful joined Perry and a host of other spiritual and political leaders inside the Houston stadium for the day-long rally, outside protesters gathered to condemn the event. "The brand of Christianity being offered today is one of fear, and we want to let people know that God loves everyone, not to be afraid," the [Associated Press](#) quoted one pastor, Dan DeLeon of the United Church of Christ in College Station, Texas, as saying. Similarly, Rodney Hinds of Amarillo "waved a sign at traffic demanding 'Pastor Perry Must Resign,'" reported AP. Added Hinds, "He abused the power of his office by calling this event from his office as governor."

Annie Laurie Gaylor of the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) (FFR), which had sued to stop Perry from calling the prayer rally, told [OneNewsNow](#) that the Governor's involvement was unacceptable. "We said it would be fine if you came here in an individual capacity," Gaylor said. "But he was misusing his public office to promote sectarian religion and a particular agenda of a sectarian Christian organization — and that is a constitutional no-no."



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But the Rev. Jim Garlow, a member of the leadership team for the prayer event, noted that the Constitution “nowhere says that when you run for office you lose your right of freedom of speech or freedom of religious expression.... [Gov. Perry] has that as much as any private citizen; he can call anyone to prayer if he wants to.” A federal judge agreed with that assessment, [dismissing the secular group’s lawsuit](#) to block Perry’s involvement in “The Response.”

That court ruling didn’t stop the opposition to the prayer event, however. The [Jewish Daily Forward](#) reported that among the scores of secular and nominally religious groups protesting the specifically Christian event were 16 Jewish rabbis, who penned a letter to the Governor protesting his call for “a full day of exclusionary prayer.” The rabbis noted that the “event is not open to all faiths, and its statement of beliefs does not represent religious diversity.” They argued that by his actions Perry was “expressing an official message of endorsement of one faith over all others, thereby sending an official message of religious exclusion and preference to all Texans who do not share that faith. We believe our religious freedom is threatened when a government official promotes religion, especially one religion over all others.”

Meanwhile, another group put legs to its grievance over the event, holding an alternate rally on August 5. As reported by the [Associated Baptist Press](#), two organizations — Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AUSCS) and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas — used Houston’s Mount Ararat Baptist Church as the site of their own secular “Family, Faith and Freedom” protest rally. “This event unites us in our conviction that government should have no favorite theology and that it must always strive to ensure that all citizens — Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, and others — are full and equal partners in the public square,” said Barry Linn of AUSCS prior to the event.

As for the political overtones surrounding the prayer rally, while Perry insisted that his effort was not politically motivated, the [Associated Press](#) noted that the high-profile event nonetheless offered him “a national spotlight before a pivotal voting group in the GOP nomination fight — in the early voting states of Iowa and South Carolina in particular — as he nears a decision on whether to run for president.”

Should Perry move ahead with a presidential campaign, AP reported, his presence in the race “could shake up the contest because Perry could attract both social and economic conservatives at a time when the GOP electorate is unsettled with the current slate of candidates. Many have been campaigning for months and are trying to break out of the pack.”

For example, while Perry led tens of thousands in prayer, “former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann were holding multiple campaign events each day in Iowa ahead of next weekend’s test vote, a straw poll that is a barometer for a campaign’s organizational strength five months before the state’s leadoff caucuses,” reported AP.

While Perry had met with potential donors and party leaders about a possible run, “he has been tightlipped about just when he would announce a decision,” reported AP. As the Governor was scheduled to follow up the prayer rally with an appearance as the featured attraction at a Redstate.com conference in South Carolina on August 13, political observers speculated that it would be a matter of days before Perry changed the complexion of the GOP presidential race by throwing his hat in the ring.

*Photo of Gov. Rick Perry praying at "The Response": AP Images*



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