

Just one month after the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals [ruled](#) that the Pledge of Allegiance and our national motto, In God We Trust, are constitutional, a federal district court in Wisconsin has struck down the federal law calling upon the President to annually proclaim a National Day of Prayer. The judge concluded that it violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment because “it encourages all citizens to engage in prayer.” The ruling will not go into effect immediately, however, because it will first be reviewed by the appeals court for that region. As a result, the 2010 National Day of Prayer, scheduled to occur on May 6, will proceed as planned.

As I [reported](#) in February, I strongly believe that a National Day of Prayer is consistent with our tradition and can be found in the roots of our nation. At the suggestion of the First Congress, President George Washington issued a proclamation of thanksgiving and prayer on October 3, 1789. He wrote, “I do recommend...that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws...” It seems illogical that the First Congress—which wrote the First Amendment—would call for and support such a proclamation if they believed it violated the very amendment they had just finished drafting.

It is clear that the recent court ruling in Wisconsin does not appreciate the original intent of our founding fathers and instead embraces a misguided interpretation of the First Amendment that has gained popularity amongst a minority during the past fifty years. But, as former Chief Justice William Rehnquist declared, “The true meaning of the Establishment Clause can only be seen in its history.” It is my deep hope that judges across our nation closely examine this history before issuing rulings on religion-related cases. I will soon sign a “friend of the court” brief urging the appeals court reviewing the Wisconsin case to uphold the 1952 statute formally establishing a National Day of Prayer, and I strongly support a [resolution](#) reaffirming that the House of Representatives wants this annual call to prayer to continue. This principle was supported by the leaders who brought this country to greatness and it should be upheld today.