

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY
WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. Mr. Speaker, just a little over 5 years ago, on June 5, 2003, I stepped on the floor of this House to take the oath of office to be only the fourth Member of Congress from the 19th Congressional District, the 236th Texan, to ever serve in the United States Congress.

But what I really want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the hour before I stepped on the floor of this House and took that oath. I met in the Speaker's office. And while we were standing around waiting for the floor to open, the House to open up its daily prayer and Pledge, one of the Speaker's staff members came over to my wife and I and said, "Congressman, would you like a few minutes alone, some quiet time before you're sworn in? We said, well, that would be great. I brought my own personal Bible with me. And so that lady led me around to a room that I don't know that a lot of people know that is in this Capitol, and that's our chapel, that's just around from the Speaker's lobby. And I didn't know exactly where she was taking us, but she opened the door, and to my wife's surprise, and myself, we saw that we were in a chapel in our Nation's Capitol. She closed that door behind us, and we walked over and knelt at the front of that chapel. And we just sat down as a couple and we began to pray because we realized what an awesome responsibility that the people in the 19th Congressional District of Texas had given us. And so we knelt there, and we began to pray. And we just said, Lord, we are about to embark on a journey that you have brought us here. We ask for Your guidance, we ask for Your direction, we ask for Your wisdom, and Father, all of those things that we're going to need to know in order to serve the American people.

And as we prayed there as a couple, it was a very special moment. And as I was sitting there and we were praying, I began to think about 232 years ago this July 4th, we thought about those men that got up and had this Declaration of Independence that started this great country called America. And I always recall the way they ended that declaration because they said, "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." You see, Mr. Speaker, they signed their death warrant for Dana and I to be able to sit there and kneel in the Nation's Capitol and exercise our right to pray to our Lord and Savior.

And I thought about the men and women over the 232 years that have served this Nation, that have given their lives and their service to protect the right for us to do that. I think about just a few hundred feet from where we are tonight, Mr. Speaker, I think about the church services that

used to be held right in our Nation's Capitol and what a privilege and honor that must have been to come over to the Nation's Capitol and not only to see the center of freedom and democracy known around the world, but to worship your Lord and Savior.

And so, Father, tonight—Mr. Speaker, tonight—and really I guess that we're talking to our Heavenly Father tonight, and we're talking to you, too, Mr. Speaker—we've been talking about an important part of America, an important part of the foundation and the values of these men that started this great Nation, the foundation of the men and women that have kept this great freedom and democracy alive over these years and how important that is, and what a shame it is going to be if we don't protect that for future generations. Unfortunately, we've seen some Federal judges try to take away what these gentlemen pledged their lives to do. I hope we never let that happen.

And so just 2 weeks ago I reflected back on that very special day that right here in our Capitol there was an opportunity to get down on our knees and pray. But what's more important is that weekly this Congressional Prayer Caucus, these men and women from both sides of the aisle, believe in America and believe in the founding principles.

More importantly they understand that Who is the ultimate leader of this universe.

And so Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this time to talk tonight about a very important part of America, and that is the ability to praise our Lord and Savior.

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN REQUESTS
PRAYER IN THE CONSTITU-
TIONAL CONVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY).

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good colleague from Arkansas for assisting and allowing me to speak tonight.

Mr. Speaker, over the next 3 or 4 days, a partisan tone will be exhibited in these Chambers, harsh rhetoric will be exchanged on both sides, some of it intentional, some of it in the heat of the moment, some of it out of simple frustration with not being able to convince ourselves of issues that are going on, but nevertheless, partisanship that is communicated back to America and America's despair that we will ever get past this partisanship.

Is there some way for us to listen to you and you listen to me and let us thoughtfully consider our positions and then make those compromises that

have to be made in order to deal with the issues that face this country?

It is not brand new. Two hundred twenty-one years ago, Benjamin Franklin observed the same partisanship, the same ugly tone going back and forth and came upon a solution that he communicated to President Washington in a letter. And I would like to read some of that letter into the RECORD tonight, because that solution I think would stand us in good stead as well.

Reading from Benjamin Franklin's letter to George Washington:

"In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how is it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings.

"And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House they labor in vain that build it.'

"I firmly believe this, and I also believe without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this partial building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and by word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

"I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that Service."

Mr. Speaker, we observe that tradition today. Every morning our House Chaplain and maybe one of our constituents from back home will come and pray and seek God's wisdom on our deliberations. As effective as that is, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that 435 members of this House observing that tradition of daily seeking out the plea that Solomon had in II Chronicles 1:10 in which he asked God for wisdom and knowledge that he might govern this great people, that 435 of us and 100 on the other end of this building, on our knees every day, seeking wisdom, guidance and knowledge as how we would reduce the partisanship, how we would try to strive valiantly to come to conclusions and compromise with each other that deal with the problems that face this country.