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## *House of Representatives*

HON. BILL SALI  
OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 2008

### In Recognition of American Religious History Week

Madame Speaker, I rise today to join with many of my colleagues in recognizing American Religious History Week, which began yesterday and goes through this Friday.

I rise not as a sectarian Christian but as an elected Representative of a religiously diverse people. In my beautiful region of Idaho, there are persons of every faith and some who hold to no faith. Some attend very traditional, liturgical Christian churches and some attend services of Eastern faiths. Some are members of Latter-Day Saint congregations and others are Pentecostal Evangelicals. Idaho has a vibrant Jewish community – Idaho was the first state in the nation to have a Jewish governor – and our state's Catholics were among millions of fellow worshippers who recently welcomed the Pope to our country.

I could keep going, but you get the point: Like most congressional districts, every major religion and denomination is represented in Idaho's First. Their adherents are full citizens of our great Republic and persons I am honored to represent here in our nation's capital.

At the same time, it is indisputable that the Judeo-Christian moral tradition was fundamental to our nation's founding. And this week, we in Congress are joining with Americans of every religious tradition in noting the importance of that tradition to the institutions we cherish and the way of life we enjoy.

Our country's Founding Fathers were imbued from an early age with a profound sense of the Judeo-Christian worldview. In a recent interview, Dr. James Hutson, chief of the Library of Congress's manuscript division, said, "Jefferson and others were tutored by ministers. They were an extremely biblically literate generation. This certainly shaped their view of Providence. The extent to which they believed in Providence would be unimaginable today. Adams and folks like that continually quoted [Jesus'] statement that a swallow cannot fall without God's knowledge. Washington talks about the invisible hand of Providence. Their biblical knowledge convinced these people that there was an invisible hand of God, and that there was a moral government of the universe."

Dr. Hutson's view is supported by historians of all persuasions. But perhaps the best way to draw attention to our country's religious history is by using the words of the Founders themselves.

Consider the words of John Witherspoon, president of what became Princeton University and a signer of the Declaration of Independence: "It is in the man of piety and inward principle, that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier. God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both."

John Jay was a co-author of the *Federalist Papers*. He served as governor of New York and later was the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He has also been called the "American Wilberforce" for his efforts to work with his British friend William Wilberforce to end the slave-trade. What is not often known is that this great statesman was the second president of the American Bible Society and argued throughout his life for the importance of biblical principles to the future of the United States.

Jay had a strong grasp on God's guidance of the formation of our nation. In 1809, he wrote to a friend, "A proper history of the United States would have much to recommend it: in some respects it would be ... unlike all others; it would develop the great plan of Providence."

God's provision to America was clear to Jay's *Federalist Papers*' co-author John Adams, as well. He knew that it was found in more than our abundant natural resources, but also in the very conscience of the people. Adams put it this way: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

In a statement made in 1778 to the Virginia General Assembly, James Madison, the future father of the Constitution and President, said, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We've staked the future of all our political institutions upon our capacity...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

George Washington echoed these same views in his Farewell Address to the nation at the end of his presidency: "Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens ... Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

America's Judeo-Christian religious heritage is rich and profound. It has shaped our institutions and nurtured our national soul. It is also the fount of the religious freedom we cherish: Those of us who believe in the God of the Bible believe He gave men and women the freedom to serve Him or not to serve Him. If that's true, we should allow that same freedom to our fellow citizens.

Our Declaration of Independence refers to "Divine Providence," our "Creator" and "the Supreme Judge of the World." Our Founders recognized their need to rely on, and submit to, His will in all things. May we, in our day and in this Chamber, continue to learn from their example.