

House considers a prayer plaque at WWII monument; interfaith coalition says 'no'

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May 22, 2014

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(RNS) An interfaith coalition has again asked the U.S. House of Representatives to reject a prayer plaque at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The proposed plaque, which is under the consideration of a House subcommittee, would feature a prayer spoken by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the radio on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

"O Lord, give us Faith," it reads in part. "Give us Faith in Thee; Faith in our sons; Faith in each other; Faith in our united crusade." It concludes with, "Thy will be done, Almighty God."

The coalition—a mix of religious and secular organizations that includes the Center for Inquiry, a humanist organization; three Jewish groups; the Hindu American Foundation; and the United Methodist Church—said the prayer does not reflect the religious diversity of the United States.

"Our religious diversity is one of our nation's great strengths," they stated in a letter to the subcommittee. "This bill, however, shows a lack of respect for this great diversity. It endorses the false notion that all veterans will be honored by a war memorial that includes a prayer that proponents characterize as reflecting our country's 'Judeo-Christian heritage and values.'"

House bill H.R. 2175 is sponsored by two Ohio Republicans, Rep. Bill Johnson and Sen. Rob Portman. Portman is a member of the United Methodist Church, one of the organizations that opposes the plaque.

Michael De Dora, director of government affairs for the Center for Inquiry, the only nontheistic group in the coalition, said his organization was happy to join with religious groups in opposing the plaque.

“When you can include a wide range of groups that include perspectives on religion, the chances you are going to succeed are greater because there is a greater chance people will find a group on the list that they identify with,” he said.

The attempt to place a prayer plaque at the memorial, which opened to the public in 2004, dates back to 2011. It has been approved by the House before but was rejected in the Senate.