



April 10, 2026

The National Museum of American Religion (NMAR) has earned its reputation as a trusted resource for information about religion's role in American history through years of thoughtful dialogue, informed reflection, and spirited debate. We are not affiliated with any religious organization or political party. Our diverse group of experts, scholars and volunteers hold one truth to be self-evident: that religious freedom as defined in the U.S. Constitution is a public good.

The United States is founded on the idea of self-determination. Not only can our citizens choose how the nation is governed, they can each choose how to govern themselves. We are a nation where all are welcome and all are free to hold whatever religious beliefs they wish, including none. Like many who hold lofty ideals, we don't always succeed. Sometimes we trip. Sometimes we hesitate. But still, we as a nation hold this right to be itself sacred. The freedom of religion, it might be said, is itself our civil religion.

We have come to a difficult crossroad in our national story. Although we defer to no political party, we at NMAR must speak out if we are to hold ourselves accountable to our mission. We have no opinion on the personal beliefs of our nation's leaders; rather, we celebrate their freedom to worship if, how and when they choose. But we find cause for serious concern in the erosion of religious freedom caused by the statements of some of the members of the current administration. Specifically, we publicly state our concern with the following reports:

- Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth:
 - Last Christmas he posted "Today we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" not from a personal account, but from his @SecWar account on X in which he purports to be speaking in his official capacity as a Cabinet secretary. On April 5, 2026, he posted a similarly religious message from the same account: "The tomb is empty. The promise is fulfilled. Through His sacrifice, we are redeemed."
 - It has been reported that calls to prayer and public messaging from the Defense Department are now imbued with Christian religious dogma. The secretary issued a call for the American people to pray for the troops involved in the Iran War "in the name of Jesus Christ."
 - Pentagon officials have expressed concern with Secretary Hegseth's perceived efforts to instill evangelical Christian teachings into everyday military life.
- Other administration officials:
 - On Monday, April 6, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins sent an email to approximately 100,000 USDA employees which began "Happy Easter. He is risen indeed!" She went on to comment on the resurrection of Jesus Christ as it appears in Christian teachings.



- On Friday, April 3, the Department of Homeland Security's official X account posted a message which included a Bible verse, an image of Jesus Christ on the cross, and references to "our Savior."
- On his official Facebook account, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Turner posted that "our living hope is firmly anchored in our Savior."

NMAR respectfully requests that the administration promptly reconsider its recent policy and practices regarding religion and discontinue those that are contrary to the non-establishment and free exercise principles of the Constitution and the long-established tradition of religious neutrality. As do all Americans, troops and federal workers have the right to worship as they see fit, and it is the responsibility of our leaders to honor and even protect this right. Likewise, it is improper in our Constitutional system for anyone to use the government to endorse or promote any specific religious belief above any other. For example, prayers and other religious invocations at any official meeting or gathering of government personnel should be appropriately neutral and avoid endorsing or favoring (or disfavoring) any specific religious tradition. Civilian and military leaders should refrain from characterizing military operations as furthering a particular divine "plan". Federal workers and military personnel must be provided with space and permission to practice their individual religious traditions or personal spiritual practices, whatever those may be, within the limits of reasonable and neutral workplace requirements or military regulations.

We ask the administration to be mindful that the role of the government is to support and defend the Constitution, not any particular religion or theological vision of the divine. By discontinuing recent practices that cross the line of non-establishment and free exercise, the government can perform its core duty of protecting the Constitution, including its historically unique principles of religious neutrality and individual freedom of conscience.

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