

## Precarious Freedom Of Speech, Religion Highlighted At National Day Of Prayer Event In Tyler

Written by {ga=patrick}

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Beje Jones lifts her hands in praise during singing at the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast held in observance of the National Day of Prayer in Tyler, Texas, on Thursday at the Harvey Convention Center. About 1,000 people attended the event a year after a federal judge ruled the Day of Prayer was unconstitutional.

Photo By Patrick Butler **By Patrick Butler** | ResonateNews.com

TYLER, Texas — Mayor Barbara Bass opened this city's 20th annual Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on Thursday by highlighting a 2010 legal challenge of the constitutionality of the National Day of Prayer, brought by the Freedom From Religion Foundation. A federal judge ruled in favor of the challenge last year, Bass said.

"This National Day of Prayer is founded on Judeo/Christian beliefs," said Bass, Tyler's first female mayor who presides over a city of nearly 100,000 people, the largest city in East Texas. "It is about serving a true God."

Tyler's event was held in conjunction with the 60th annual National Day of Prayer, held nationwide. It is the 20th event for Tyler.

"Last year when we met," she told an estimated 1,000 attendees at the prayer breakfast, "there was a (federal) judge who decided it was unconstitutional for our government to designate a national day of prayer. This year we have a different response. On April 14, 2011 the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals tossed out the case against the National Day of Prayer. The appeals court ruled 3-0 that the Freedom From Religion Foundation and their claimants did not have any standing to continue the case against congressional actions affirming the National Day of Prayer.

To vigorous applause, the mayor underscored the definition of inalienable rights.

"Our right to freedom of religion and freedom of speech are written in our Constitution as inalienable," she said, "but let me tell you that freedom of religion and freedom of speech are God given rights, they are not man-made rights.

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Freedoms of religion and speech are precarious in America, Bass told ResonateNews.com after the breakfast.

“There has been a lot of media hype against the National Day of Prayer,” Bass said to Resonate reporters, “and there was inference we didn’t have the right to that National day of Prayer. Not only do I think Congress has the right to designate special days of prayer, but we have the right as Americans and Christians to stand up for what we believe in and that’s freedom of religion and freedom of speech. The court decision reaffirmed what we know is God’s will.”

A 30-member choir made up of uniformed Smith County sheriff's deputies sat behind Bass and platform speakers at the city's Harvey Convention Center. Attendees stood, many with arms and hands fully extended into the air, to the sounds of the sheriff's deputies' performance, which included an electric guitar, bass, drums and electric piano played by uniformed deputies.

“What did you think of my deputies,” asked a beaming Sheriff J.B. Smith to Resonate News reporters after the event. “Didn’t they sound beautiful?”

After the mayor’s opening remarks and law-enforcement officers’ singing, prayers for unity in the Tyler community, for families, for government and for national leadership were offered. A time of “free prayer” — where each table of about ten people prayed for a specific theme presented at their table — was made.

The 90-minute gathering was a success from her vantage point, Bass said.

“Today seeing this hall full of people standing and praising God just made me know what a blessed community we live in. I understand from other communities they don't have a Mayor’s Prayer Breakfasts and for us to continue to have that — this is our 20th year — is something I think we’ve got to hang onto. We’ve got to continue to support it, because if we don't stand up for our freedom of religion, they will be taken away from us. To have this many people at a Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast at 6:30 in the morning to say I’m about being a Christian, being part of a faith-based community, is awesome.”