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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 184 Session of  
2019

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INTRODUCED BY BOYLE, APRIL 2, 2019

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON RULES, APRIL 2, 2019

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A RESOLUTION

1 Urging members of the House of Representatives who have the  
2 opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a legislative  
3 session to craft a prayer respectful of all religious  
4 beliefs.

5 WHEREAS, William Penn believed that "no People can be truly  
6 happy . . . if abridged of the freedom of their Consciences, as  
7 to their Religious Profession and Worship" and, as a result,  
8 drew people to Pennsylvania from diverse faiths who had suffered  
9 because of restrictions based on their religious beliefs; and

10 WHEREAS, The membership of the House of Representatives  
11 consists of men and women of diverse faiths and beliefs who  
12 represent constituents who are Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs,  
13 Muslims, Jews and Christians, and of many other religious  
14 affiliations, as well as agnostics, humanists, atheists and  
15 other nonbelievers; and

16 WHEREAS, On May 5, 2014, in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the  
17 United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the town of  
18 Greece, holding that the town's practice of beginning its town  
19 board meetings with prayers does not violate the Establishment

1 Clause of the First Amendment; and

2 WHEREAS, Justice Kennedy wrote in his opinion that the  
3 purposes of legislative prayer are "to lend gravity" to sessions  
4 where "the fractious business of governing" will take place and  
5 noted that legislature prayer should be "solemn and respectful  
6 in tone"; and

7 WHEREAS, According to Justice Kennedy, legislative prayers  
8 that are used as an opportunity to condemn or try to convert  
9 people who are not members of a particular religion would not  
10 comport with the Constitution; and

11 WHEREAS, The majority opinion in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*  
12 implies that prayers may be impermissible if they "denigrate  
13 nonbelievers or religious minorities, threaten damnation, or  
14 preach conversion"; and

15 WHEREAS, A prayer that cites a particular religious belief as  
16 "our only hope," that "we've lost sight of you, we've forgotten  
17 you, God, in our country, and we're asking you to forgive us"  
18 and that "every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess,"  
19 is unnecessarily divisive and polarizing; and

20 WHEREAS, These statements were offered in prayer on Monday,  
21 March 25, 2019, during a legislative session of the House of  
22 Representatives, offending many members of the House of  
23 Representatives and many guests of the members; and

24 WHEREAS, Several members of the House of Representatives  
25 walked off the House floor in protest during the prayer; and

26 WHEREAS, A fire and brimstone prayer such as this epitomizes  
27 religious intolerance; and

28 WHEREAS, Prayers offered before the House of Representatives  
29 in the daily order of business should reflect mutual respect and  
30 religious tolerance of our colleagues and constituents and not

1 intimidate, demean or degrade; therefore be it

2       RESOLVED, That members of the House of Representatives who  
3 have the opportunity to offer a prayer in the course of a  
4 legislative session are urged to follow the request of Speaker  
5 Turzai to "craft a prayer that is respectful of all religious  
6 beliefs".