



INTERCESSORS FOR AMERICA THE INFORMER

A biblical, prophetic look at current events for those who have a heart to pray for our nation.

On Watch in Washington

February 1, 2012

FACING ANOTHER TRILLION-PLUS DEFICIT

The government faces a fourth year of trillion-plus deficits in 2012, according to new projections released Tuesday—numbers which also show little relief in the future unless Washington comes to grips with needed changes in its tax and spending policies.

The Congressional Budget Office steps squarely into the 2012 campaign season with the 147-page report which might have been subtitled “It’s not just the economy stupid, it’s also the debt.”

The \$1.079 trillion deficit now projected for this fiscal year ending Sept. 30 is a step backwards from what CBO had predicted in August. And to punch home its message, the non-partisan agency outlines an especially grim scenario in which Congress not only extends all the current Bush-era tax cuts, but pulls the plug on the \$1.2 trillion in sequester set in motion by the Budget Control Act last summer.

Under this scenario—which can’t be ruled out politically—deficits would stubbornly hover just under \$1 trillion through 2017, adding another \$4.7 trillion altogether to the mounting federal debt.

Under the more prudent—and many would say unrealistic—scenario of ending tax breaks and implementing cuts, the cumulative deficits would be \$1.72 trillion or \$3 trillion less from 2013-2017. But even this path comes with a warning from CBO: that debt service costs are already on the rise and will command an ever greater share of the annual budget.

“The federal budget remains out of balance throughout the decade,” the report reads. “The resulting accumulation of debt, along with rising interest rates, drives up the cost of financing that debt; in CBO’s projections, net interest costs grow significantly from 1.4 percent of GDP this year to 2.5 percent in 2022.”

To put this in some perspective, by 2017, annual interest payments on the debt would begin to rival and soon exceed what Washington will be spending on Medicaid, the state-federal healthcare program for the poor and disabled.

The economy is not forgotten in the report, and in fact appears to be a major reason for the higher deficit predicted for this year. (Contributor: [Politico](#))

Pray that our national leaders will have God’s wisdom in making the decisions that are necessary for the United States and its citizenry to deal with this financial crisis through good stewardship. Ask the Lord to grant wise financial allocations to necessary expenditures and the wisdom to address and cease expenditures on non-necessary items in the national budget. Pray for bipartisan support concerning necessary budgetary change.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he may have enough to finish it; lest perhaps, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all those seeing begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish.” (Luke 14:28-30)

PARENTS TELEVISION COUNCIL: "THE ALARMING FAMILY HOUR"

A conservative advocacy group is growing more concerned over the amount of skin shown during network prime-time television.

The Parents Television Council is concerned about the troubling trend it has been documenting even before releasing its report "[The Alarming Family Hour](#)" more than four years ago. Melissa Henson is director of communications and public education for PTC.

"What we have seen so far this season is a fairly noticeable increase in the frequency of depictions of nudity on prime-time broadcast television -- and that's something that used to be unheard of not that long ago."

"Even though it started creeping into 10:00 p.m. shows, you never would have seen that sort of content, certainly during the family hour. But now you are."

Henson says this could just be the beginning, depending on how the Supreme Court rules on a couple of cases regarding indecency -- a battle that has gone on for decades between the networks and decency advocates.

"The concern, of course, is that if the Supreme Court sides with the networks in these cases, I think we can all expect to see even more of this sort of content in the future," laments the PTC spokeswoman. "And it's going to be increasingly difficult for parents to avoid it when they're watching TV with their kids."

She says it is very telling that more and more TV contracts for actors include nudity clauses. And as PTC points out, the broadcast networks would not be waging the legal battle currently before the Supreme Court for something they do not intend to do.

In a statement earlier this month, PTC president Tim Winter warned that if the high court rules in favor of the networks, "the American people are going to get a rude awakening when broadcast TV become indistinguishable from Cinemax, HBO, or something even more explicit."

PTC maintains a weekly, online "family guide" to prime-time network television indicating which shows may include indecent content unsuitable for children, which shows contain adult-oriented themes/dialogue that may be inappropriate for youngsters, and which shows are family-friendly and promote responsible themes and traditional values.

The encouraging news is that the Supreme Court seems reluctant to end the government's historic policing of the broadcast airwaves and to strike down the "indecency" rules that guide prime-time TV shows.

Broadcasters use the public airwaves, and the "government can insist on a certain modicum of decency," said Justice Antonin Scalia during oral arguments on the constitutionality of a ban on four-letter words and nudity earlier in a January 2012 review.

"All we are asking for is for a few channels" where parents can be confident their children will not hear profanity or see sex scenes, said Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., who is a parent of two young children.

At issue before the high court was a plea from the broadcast industry urging the justices to strike down or sharply limit the government's authority to police the airwaves. Since the 1930s, federal law has prohibited radio and TV broadcasters from putting on the airwaves material that is "obscene, indecent or profane."

In the past decade, Bush administration appointees at the Federal Communication Commission launched a crackdown on indecency. Several TV networks, including Fox and ABC, were hit with heavy fines. Fox was fined for allowing celebrities, including singer Cher and U2's Bono, to utter four-letter words during live awards programs. ABC was fined for showing a brief nude scene in an episode of "NYPD Blue."

Lawyers for the networks urged the Supreme Court to throw out the fines and strike down the FCC's indecency rules. They said federal policing of broadcast content was outdated and no longer warranted. They said most Americans receive entertainment and news through cable TV or the Internet, and these media have full 1st Amendment rights. Broadcasters deserve the same rights, they said.

They also argued that current FCC policy against indecency is vague and arbitrary and should be voided on those grounds. They noted, for example, that the broadcast of "Saving Private Ryan," the World War II movie by Steven Spielberg that portrayed the Normandy landings, was permitted, even though it included plenty of four-letter words. At the same time, other broadcasters were fined for allowing a single four-letter word.

"People understand that context counts," Roberts told one lawyer for the broadcasters in January. "Your argument is that they can't take context into account."

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy said he would not like to see a time when "celebrities and want-to-be celebrities" had a free speech right to utter profanities on television and radio.

At one point, Justice Elena Kagan agreed with the broadcasters that the rules on indecency seem arbitrary. "It seems no one can use dirty words, except Steven Spielberg," she commented.

But she also voiced opposition to throwing out the rules entirely. Broadcasters have been given free use of the public airwaves. "It seems to be a good thing to have a safe haven" in prime-time broadcasts where standards of decency are enforced, she said. (Contributor: [Parents TV](#), [One News Now](#), [Los Angeles Times](#))

Ask the Lord to encourage the Supreme Court Justices to maintain a high degree of morality in protecting U.S. airwaves from carrying immoral content, especially during prime-time viewing by family members. Give thanks for those justices who are already sensitive to the issue of wanting the airwaves protected from indecent visual imagery and auditory broadcasts.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

U.S. THREATENS TO STOP MILITARY AID TO EGYPT

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta is demanding that Egyptian military leaders lift the travel ban on American democracy advocates in Egypt.

The U.S. Congress has threatened to cut military and financial aid to Egypt, citing harassment of non-governmental organizations, Yedioth Ahronoth reported Tuesday.

Congress has also threatened to halt the activity of American companies in the Arab country.

The recent tug of war between Cairo and Washington began when a number of US citizens working to promote democracy and human rights in Egypt were barred from leaving the country.

Among the U.S. citizens is Egypt director of the International Republican Institute Sam LaHood, the son of U.S. Secretary for Transportation Ray LaHood.

Egyptian authorities are preventing from leaving the country, citing a probe opened last month when heavily armed security forces raided the offices of 10 international organizations. Egyptian officials have defended the raid as part of legitimate investigation into the groups' work and funding.

'Foreign hands' behind protests

The investigation is closely intertwined with Egypt's political turmoil since Hosni Mubarak's fall nearly a year ago. The generals who took power have accused "foreign hands" of being behind protests against their rule and frequently depict the protesters as receiving foreign funds in a plot to destabilize the country.

On Monday the Americans sought refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo because they fear they could be arrested or physically harmed due to their activities.

Sam LaHood said he fears Egyptian authorities will put him and his fellow pro-democracy workers on trial.

In a letter to Egyptian Military Council head Hussein Tantawi, 11 senators raised the possibility of a cutoff of U.S. aid to Cairo.

"Continued restriction of their activities and harassment of international and Egyptian staff will be looked at with great concern, particularly in light of Egypt's considerable U.S. assistance," the senators said in the letter, dated Jan. 18.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta phoned Tantawi on Monday and demanded that he lift the travel ban.

After the leadership change from [Gamal Abdel Nasser in the early 70's](#) to Anwar Sadat, Egypt replaced Russian military advisers and weaponry with U.S. military advisers and weapons support. This eventually worked in great support of better relations between Egypt and Israel. The Camp David meetings between Sadat, Begin, and Carter were instrumental in bringing stability to that region.

American aid to Egypt currently includes a yearly stipend of \$ 1.3 billion to the army and an additional \$300 million in economic aid. With the current attitudes brought into play by the Moslem Brotherhood this all may be lost. (Contributors: AP, AFP, [Wikipedia](#), [YNet News](#))

Pray that the relationship and cooperation between Israel, Egypt and the U.S. will not be lost. Ask the Lord to help these countries see the value of a mutual relationship with one another. A peaceful relationship on the Egyptian – Israeli border is an important asset, especially with the ongoing turmoil with the Iranian and Syrian factions. Please continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee." (Psalms 122:6)

"His heart is secure; he will have no fear, in the end he will look in triumph on his foes." (Psalm 112:8)

IRAN: PASTOR YOUCEF REFUSES TO RECANT

Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani is still alive today because of international pressure on Iran - people worldwide raising their voices, demanding that his life be spared. We need to keep that pressure on, and the ACLJ is launching a new initiative.

From working closely with Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani's Iranian attorney, we know that the more people who speak out for him, the more pressure is placed on Iran to release him. It is absolutely critical that more people learn about Pastor Youcef's plight. Your voice has helped us get the White House, Secretary of State Clinton, Ambassador Rice, the United Nations and countless other elected officials and candidates for office to speak out for Pastor Youcef.

Sources inside Iran have reported to the ACLJ that the Chief Justice of the Gilan Provincial Court in Iran is pressuring Christian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani to recant his faith in Christ.

Last week the Chief Justice, in a private meeting, ordered that additional pressure be put on Pastor Youcef to recant his faith. Again, Pastor Youcef responded by refusing to deny his faith in Christ and reiterating to the Iranian authorities that he could not return to Islam because he was never a Moslem.

Iran has renewed its attempts to pressure and coerce Pastor Youcef to renounce his faith in Christ under threat of death.

Pastor Youcef remains committed to his Christian faith and maintains that he was never a Moslem. In June 2011, the [Iranian Supreme Court](#) upheld Pastor Youcef's execution sentence for apostasy, but remanded the case to the trial court for a determination if he was ever a Moslem as an adult. However, the trial court, the 11th branch of Iran's Gilan Provincial Court, determined – [before taking evidence](#) – that Pastor Youcef was a Moslem because he was born into a Moslem family.

At that hearing, when the Iranian judges demanded that he “repent,” Youcef responded, “Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?” The judges replied, “To the religion of your ancestors, Islam.” To which he replied, “I cannot.”

This court has ignored Iranian law (which requires a written ruling within a week of a hearing) and [its own promise](#) to issue a final determination of Pastor Youcef's fate by mid-December 2011. Instead, the Iranian court continues its attempt to essentially make this case go away by refusing to issue a decision while it actively pressures Pastor Youcef to recant.

The ACLJ is actively engaged in the effort to save his life and secure his release. Learn more about how you can lend your voice to Pastor Youcef [here](#).

A more in depth accounting of his persecution struggles time line in Iran can be followed by visiting [Farsinet.com](#).

[Follow this link](#) to take action and learn more. Jay Sekulow is now utilizing a Twitter account to release daily updates about the plight of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani. Please [check the link](#), above, for more information on this new strategy. Let us continue to raise our voices on behalf of the life of this innocent man. (Contributor: [Jay Sekulow](#); [American Center for Law and Justice](#), [ACLJ](#), Capitol Hill Prayer Partners)

Please lift Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani and his family in prayer. As Iran is being slowly and deliberately isolated from the nations of the world, please pray that its

leaders not use the life of this pastor as a "bargaining chip" or an act of retaliation in response.

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:11)

GOLD INSTEAD OF U.S. DOLLARS FOR IRANIAN OIL?

India, the world's fourth-largest oil consumer, said it [would not take steps to cut petroleum imports from Iran](#) despite U.S. and European sanctions against Tehran Sunday night.

It has been reported by the *debkafiles* that India is the first buyer of Iranian oil to agree to pay for its purchases in gold [instead of the U.S. dollar](#). China may follow suit. India and China take about one million barrels per day, or 40 percent of Iran's total exports of 2.5 million bpd. Both are superpowers in terms of gold assets. By trading in gold, New Delhi and Beijing enable Tehran to bypass the upcoming freeze on its central bank's assets and the oil embargo which the European Union's foreign ministers agreed to impose on January 23.

The EU currently buys around 20 percent of Iran's oil exports. India thus joins China in opting out of the U.S.-led European sanctions against Iran's international oil and financial business. Turkey announced publicly last week that it would not adhere to any sanctions against Iran's nuclear program unless they were imposed by the United Nations Security Council.

[The vast sums involved in these transactions are expected to boost the price of gold and depress the value of the U.S. dollar](#) on world markets.

It is interesting to note and watch China and their gold acquisitions. It was reported by Forbes.com that China has [started buying large quantities of gold](#).

Analysts [believe](#) China bought as much as 490 tons of gold in 2011, double the estimated 245 tons in 2010. "The thing that's caught people's minds is the massive increase in Chinese buying," remarked Ross Norman of Sharps Pixley, a London gold brokerage, this month.

So who in China is buying all this gold?

The People's [Bank of China](#), the central bank, has been hinting that it is purchasing. "No asset is safe now," [said](#) the PBOC's Zhang Jianhua at the end of last month. "The only choice to hedge risks is to hold hard currency—gold." He also said it was smart strategy to buy on market dips. [Analysts naturally jumped on his comment as proof that China, the world's fifth-largest holder of the metal, is in the market for more.](#)

An Indian delegation visited Tehran last week to discuss payment options in view of the new sanctions. The two sides were reported to have agreed that payment for [the oil purchased would be partly in yen and partly in rupees](#). The switch to gold was kept dark.

India thus joins China in opting out of the US-led European sanctions against Iran's international oil and financial business. Turkey announced publicly last week that it would not adhere to any sanctions against Iran's nuclear program unless they were imposed by the United Nations Security Council.

The EU decision banned the signing of new oil contracts with Iran at once, while phasing out existing transactions by July 1, 2012, when the European embargo, like the measure enforced by the United States, becomes total.

The European foreign ministers also approved a freeze on the assets of the Central Bank of Iran which handles all the country's oil transactions. However, the damage those sanctions cause the Iranian economy will be substantially cushioned by the oil deals to be channeled through Turkish and Indian state banks. [China for its part has declared its opposition to sanctions against Iran.](#)

Many Iranian lawmakers and officials have called for an immediate ban on oil exports to the European bloc before its ban fully goes into effect in July, arguing that the 27 EU nations account for only about 18 percent of Iran's overall oil sales and would be hurt more by the decision than Iran. China, a key buyer of Iranian crude, has blasted the embargo.

Dr. Shmuel Bar, Director of Studies at the Institute of Policy and Strategy in Herzliya, Israel says the ramifications of a nuclear Iran are:

- The classic European thesis which has now been adopted in Washington is that there is some - yet undiscovered - enticement that can be offered to Iran which would hold greater value than becoming a nuclear power. A cursory examination of what Iran believes it can achieve with even the image of being a threshold state will show that nothing the West can offer Iran (short of total hegemony over the Gulf and parts of Central Asia) can give Iran more. Furthermore, the basic Iranian perception of the conspiratorial West is that such offers are no more than a ruse to disarm Iran of the only capability that can protect it from Western subterfuge.
- Even if we accept that Iran is tending to a democratic counter-revolution, the timeline for the transformation makes this irrelevant to the nuclear crisis. Even the optimists do not see democratic change happening within the next year or two, the time most experts believe Iran needs to cross the threshold of a military nuclear capability. And because even the public that seeks democratic change will congratulate the regime for its achievement, acquisition of a nuclear bomb will only lengthen the road to democracy in Iran.
- What would a nuclear Middle East look like? Certainly not a re-run of the Cold War. We should expect that a nuclear Iran will move to assert its dominance in the Persian Gulf and to gain hegemony over the Gulf, including dictating oil production levels. Iran will also assert itself in the heart of the Middle East by using terror with impunity. These and the very potential of a nuclear confrontation in the region should bring the Western world to the conclusion that the best option remains prevention at all costs.

(Contributors: [Forbes](#), [Breitbart/AFP](#), [Commodity Online](#), [Alarabiya](#), [debkafile](#), [Herzliya Conference](#), [The Jerusalem Post](#), Capitol Hill Prayer Partners)

Pray that the nations that are aiding Iran be given God's wisdom to stop fostering and strengthen the hand of a rogue nation that is determined to develop a nuclear weapons program and destabilize the current balance of power in the Middle East. Pray that the Lord will have mercy on His people, and lead them through these trying times with His hand of protection and guidance. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret - it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. Forget a little while and the wicked shall

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be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more." (Psalm 37:7-10)

U.S. TRIES TO STEADY OIL-RICH NIGERIA

U.S. officials are monitoring developments in Nigeria, where massive protests and a series of bombings by a shadowy Islamist group have rocked the West African nation, a key U.S. oil supplier.

Concerns about the security situation facing President Goodluck Jonathan mounted after a series of coordinated suicide car bombings targeted police stations in the northern city of Kano this month.

State Department officials and regional analysts are downplaying the likelihood that the violence will interrupt crude oil exports, noting that the unrest centers on a region far from the oil facilities along Nigeria's southern coastline.

U.S. and Nigerian officials engaged in high-level talks last week in Abuja, the Nigerian capital, with a focus on how Mr. Jonathan's government "can improve its security response" to the threat posed by the Islamist group Boko Haram, a State Department spokeswoman said.

This past Sunday, Boko Haram militants ruled out talks with the government and threatened more attacks in Nigeria.

President Jonathan told Reuters that Boko Haram militants have infiltrated the military, [police and his own government](#).

Nerves have been raw since the Jan. 20 bombings killed an estimated 185 people. The explosions hit just days after widespread demonstrations and the threat of a nationwide labor union strike nearly brought the country to its knees.

Analysts have been careful to isolate the Islamist violence from the protests, which have been embraced by a broad cross-section of Nigerians.

Nonetheless, a two-pronged crisis is harrying Nigeria as it struggles to overcome crushing poverty and a tense divide between the predominantly Christian south and the mostly Moslem north.

Social frustrations were running high long before Mr. Jonathan, a Christian from the oil-rich southern Niger Delta region, rose to power last year.

About 70 percent of Nigerians live on no more than \$1.25 a day. Though the nation is Africa's leading oil producer, it must import gasoline because its own refineries have collapsed as a result of widespread corruption.

Public anger boiled over this month when Mr. Jonathan, under budgetary duress, abruptly removed government subsidies for fuel, which sent gas prices soaring from about \$1.70 to \$3.50 per gallon.

The president was forced to reinstate the subsidies at the threat of a nationwide labor strike that likely would have crippled the oil export industry.

With gas prices down again and protests subsiding, the Jonathan government felt it had dodged a bullet. Then the Dec. 20 bombings hit, and a fresh wave of unease washed over the country.

The blasts put the spotlight back on Boko Haram, which is rooted in the mainly Moslem north. The group has been the focus of growing international concern since claiming responsibility for a similar bombing that killed 18 people at the U.N. headquarters in Abuja in August.

The threat to Nigeria's stability, meanwhile, has become an issue of increasing interest amid shifts in the world's crude oil market.

With the European Union agreeing to join a U.S.-led boycott of crude produced by Iran, analysts point to the opportunity, as well as the possible need, for others to increase production.

The fifth-largest oil provider for the U.S., Nigeria delivered about 850,000 barrels a day last year. It supplies U.S. refineries with about 9 percent of their daily crude intake.

The country's potential to play a bigger role in global oil markets likely bolsters U.S. eagerness to help Mr. Jonathan prevent a security meltdown.

"Nigeria is the African country of greatest strategic importance to the United States, and therefore we have to be concerned about the stability of its government," said John Campbell, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who served as U.S. ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2007.

[Reuters reports](#) that Nigerian and Western security experts believe a small, increasingly ambitious and sophisticated group of extremists controls the very top of the group. A handful of those members have received training outside Nigeria, including from AQIM.

Nigeria-based security sources who track Boko Haram told Reuters that members of the group have been going to training camps with brigades of Algerian AQIM for the past six years. Small units of five or six members train at a time; no more than a few dozen have been trained in total, the sources said.

The foreign minister of neighboring Niger told Reuters last week that members of Boko Haram received explosives training at AQIM camps in the Sahel region, which runs along the southern edge of the Sahara desert. The U.N. Security Council said this month that it had been told that Boko Haram members had received training in AQIM camps in Mali. (Contributor: [Reuters](#), [Washington Times](#))

Pray for the citizens of Nigeria and for the leadership of that country. Ask the Lord to grant wisdom to those who are administrating justice in the regions that are under attack by radical Moslems. Ask the Lord to open the eyes of understanding to those who are being used by radical factions to foster unrest and destruction in Nigeria. Pray for God's protection of those who profess Jesus as Lord and are under attack by these Islamic factions.

"If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the Lord, who is my refuge--then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;" (Psalm 91:9-11)

COLLEGIATE DAY OF PRAYER FEBRUARY 23

Throughout American history our colleges have been repeatedly blessed and transformed by intense seasons of spiritual awakening. The early records of many of our best universities read like a virtual history of spiritual revival. In fact, no other nation has ever enjoyed as many student awakenings for as many consecutive years as the United States of America... For nearly a hundred years the Church in America observed a day of united prayer for God to awaken and revive our colleges. At a time when the spiritual needs of our nation and world are so great, and so many are calling for more student prayer, is there any reason why this historic day of prayer should not continue? (Source; [Collegiate Day of Prayer](#))
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PRAYER FOCUS ON THIS WEEK'S CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

Teacher asks Supreme Court to reverse decision banning patriotic, historical banners - A

California public school teacher filed a petition asking the Supreme Court of the United States to review a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which [held](#) a California public school board could require the teacher to remove two classroom banners displaying patriotic and historical phrases. The first banner contained America's national motto "In God We Trust"; a portion of the Pledge of Allegiance; a line from the patriotic song *America the Beautiful*; and the phrase "God Bless America." The second poster displayed words from the Declaration of Independence. According to the [President and Chief Counsel](#) of the Thomas More Law Center, the law firm representing the teacher, "This case is a prime example of how public schools across our nation are cleansing our classrooms of our Christian heritage while promoting atheism and other non-Christian religions under the guise of cultural diversity." Although the school board ordered the removal of the religious patriotic and historical banners, it permitted other teachers to continue displaying religious items including Tibetan prayer flags, a poster of Gandhi's "7 Social Sins," and a display of the Buddhist leader Dali Lama.

Alaska Airlines announces end to in-flight prayer cards - Alaska Airlines is [ending](#) a more than 30-year tradition of including prayer cards on each passenger's meal tray. The cards featured Bible quotes from the book of Psalms such as "I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving," and were distributed to all passengers receiving on-board meals. An airline spokesperson said that positive feedback always had outweighed complaints until recently. The airline is now terminating the practice after receiving complaints from "many . . . who believe religion is inappropriate on an airplane." One critic [said](#) the cards made him nervous about the flight's safety: "My reasoning was, if they put that card on the plate, they must be worried that something bad was going to happen. If they're worried, I'm worried."

Another [said](#) she found them offensive "[i]n the spirit of diversity." The airline's [email](#) to frequent flyers announcing the change said, "It is important that everyone know that this decision does not change our core values nor our care for our customers."

New York State Senate takes step in reversing NYC ban on church use of public school facilities.

The New York State Senate Education Committee passed a bill this week that would reverse a NYC policy that allows public schools to rent their facilities to community groups after-hours, while denying the same privilege to churches. The bill would enable churches to be granted the same access as other community groups. Currently, NYC is the only major school district in the nation that bans religious groups from renting school buildings. <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S6087A-2011>

Residents, instead of school board officials, pray at Indian River School Board meeting. Residents, instead of school board officials, delivered prayers at a recent Indian River School Board meeting. The Supreme Court recently declined the school board's appeal of a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, which held unconstitutional the school board's policy of opening meetings with prayer. Residents are now attempting to ensure prayer's place in meetings by showing up to give prayers during the meetings. <http://www.delawareonline.com/article/20120125/NEWS01/201250351/Residents-offer-up-prayers-Indian-River-meeting?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7C%7Cp>

Another NC deliberative body prohibits references to Jesus in meeting invocations. In response to the Supreme Court's recent decision declining to clarify the law governing prayers in public deliberative bodies, the New Hanover County Commission changed its prayer practice to explicitly prohibit references to specific deities. According to the commission's chairman, "[the county] would be breaking the law if they let someone include Christ in a prayer before the meeting."

<http://www.wect.com/story/16581691/christian-references-removed-from-political-invocation>