



March 18, 2010

Mr. Rob Curry, Executive Director
Atheists of Florida, Inc
3614 S. Manhattan Ave.
Tampa, FL 33629

Dear Mr. Curry:

Thank you for your comments during your appearances at recent City Commission meetings, and your letter of March 15 that you distributed to the Commissioners on that date. As elected officials, we strongly support input from citizens on any subject and welcome their comments. As the Mayor, I have learned the importance of patience with and tolerance of all viewpoints, however unpopular they may be, and respect anyone's right to disagree. As you likely observed, all citizens are encouraged to speak.

The practice of opening Lakeland City Commission meetings with an invocation has a long history and will continue unless the City Commission decides it should be changed. Every effort is made to ensure that those offering an inspirational message be representative of Lakeland's diverse religious community. Those in attendance or watching on television are free to participate or not, and I can assure you that anyone appearing with business before the Commission is treated fairly and respectfully regardless of their participation. As Mayor, I am comfortable in speaking for my colleagues when I assure you that the same practice will continue as well.

Thank you for your interest and best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gow B. Fields".

Gow B. Fields
Mayor, City of Lakeland

- cc: Lakeland City Commission
- Doug Thomas, City Manager
- Tony Delgado, Deputy City Manager
- Stanley Hawthorne, Assistant City Manager
- Tim McCausland, City Attorney
- Kevin Cook, Director of Communications