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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 71

Offered January 18, 2000

Memorializing the Congress of the United States to propose an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to allow for voluntary school prayer.

Patrons—Landes, Broman, Byron, Cox, McDonnell and Ruff; Senator: Newman

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

WHEREAS, the framers of the Constitution, recognizing free exercise of religion as an unalienable right, secured its protection with the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States; and

WHEREAS, statements of belief in a Supreme Power and the virtue of seeking strength and protection from that Power are prevalent throughout our national history; and

WHEREAS, today, there are numerous signs of harmonious church/state co-existence, including organized prayer at every Congressional session; the use of the Bible while administering the oath of office; and the imprinting of "In God we trust" on the national currency; and

WHEREAS, prayer in public schools existed for nearly 200 years before the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* that a government-composed nondenominational "Regents" prayer recited by students was unconstitutional as a violation of the establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment; and

WHEREAS, this decision has severely constrained the exercise of religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment; and

WHEREAS, in the aftermath of the recent tragic events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, many believe that providing for school prayer would help to prevent these incomprehensible acts of violence from recurring at other schools; and

WHEREAS, several resolutions have been introduced during the 106th Congress, proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to allow for individual or group prayer in public schools and other public institutions; and

WHEREAS, the proposed amendments would not prescribe the content of the prayer, endorse one religion over another, or require any person to participate in prayer; and

WHEREAS, voluntary prayer is a beneficial practice that provides the opportunity for free expression of religion and rebuilding a moral emphasis needed in a country troubled by outbreaks of unprecedented school violence; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Congress of the United States be urged to propose an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to allow for voluntary school prayer; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House transmit copies of this resolution to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate, and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation in order that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly in this matter.

INTRODUCED

HJ71