

**At the Supreme Court, All Work and No Pray  
Tony Perkins' Washington's update.**



The Supreme Court giveth, and the Supreme Court taketh away. Just days after handing down one of the biggest victories for religious freedom in a half-century, the justices are back to ignoring the principles they upheld. Unlike last week, when it told the government to keep its nose out of church business, the Court sent the exact opposite message this morning to anti-religion opportunists by rejecting a case on public prayer. The decision blindsided religious groups, who thought the suit had a reasonable chance of appeal. Instead, the battle over prayer at government meetings came to a sudden end, leaving in place a ridiculous decision by the Fourth Circuit Court to limit the number of "Jesus" references in every petition offered.

The suit kicked off five years ago, when two women from Forsyth County, North Carolina challenged the policy allowing prayers in Jesus's name. Although opponents said the policy violated the Establishment Clause, FRC and others disagreed. Everyone in town, regardless of their religion, had an open invitation to pray at county meetings. The schedule was decided on a first-come, first-served basis, and leaders even advertised the number for the clerk's office so that churches from as many faiths as possible could volunteer. Until 2007, when the board eliminated prayers altogether, everyone from imams to rabbis had offered invocations. That didn't matter to

the Fourth Circuit Court, who seemed to object to the religious make-up of the County. Since Forsyth is overwhelmingly Christian, a majority of the prayers were in Jesus's name. To combat that, the Appeals Court decided that local governments would have to start monitoring any "excessive" mentions of Jesus.

By not hearing the case, the Supreme Court agreed--meaning that it is now law, not just in Forsyth County, but every state under the Fourth Circuit's jurisdiction (Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina), that every government body use this "Jesus-counting approach" in public prayers. When the decision takes effect, it will be illegal for pastors in any government assembly to mention Jesus except once or twice at the end of their prayers--or make any statements about who Jesus is and what He's done for us. FRC and 15 members of the U.S. House of Representatives Prayer Caucus had weighed in with an amicus brief in hopes that the Court would step in and stop this wave of anti-religious censorship. Unfortunately for people (like FRC staff!) who live in these states, our prayers will have to be answered before they can truly be offered. For more on the case and its fallout, you can read our brief [here](#).