

December 14, 2018

Dear Members of the Minnesota Legislative Prayer Caucus:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the March 9, 2019 lecture to be presented by Professor Steve Green. My apologies for not responding sooner, but I wanted to make sure my letter appropriately reflects my professional and personal convictions. In addition to my letter, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with members of the Minnesota Legislative Prayer Caucus.

Please also know that the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) is grateful to the State of Minnesota for its long-term partnership in preserving and presenting our State's history. This sustained and substantial commitment has paid huge dividends across Minnesota and beyond as MNHS emerged decades ago as a national leader among public history organizations. Today, the organization is considered by many in the field to be the finest state historical society in the country. I hope that all Minnesotans take pride in this well-earned reputation. For nearly fifteen years, I admired MNHS from afar in my roles in Kentucky as it worked to address relevant and sometimes challenging topics and to add new voices to the historical narrative. As of July 1, it has been my privilege to serve as the organization's Director and CEO.

Rigorous scholarship is a cornerstone of the discipline of history and therefore, of our work at the Minnesota Historical Society. And, educational relevance is an MNHS strategic priority. The History Forum series, of which the March 9 program is a part, reflects MNHS's commitment to both scholarship and to timely topics. Professor Steve Green is eminently qualified to present the March 9th program. In fact, Christian historian and Messiah College Professor and author of *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*, John Fea, describes Professor Green's book *Inventing a Christian Nation: The Myth of the Religious Founding* as:

...the most thorough critique of Christian nationalism available today. Steven Green approaches this controversial subject with scholarly insight, a generally irenic spirit, and a comprehensive analysis of the literature produced by those who defend the idea that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. Anyone interested in this subject must read this book.

I am confident that Professor Green will present a well-grounded lecture and will welcome questions at the conclusion of his presentation. I encourage anyone interested in this topic to attend and participate in respectful discussion. Public dialogue is a key objective of the History Forum series. That dialogue, regardless of the topic and one's point of view, should include core questions. I am inspired by the way

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Stanford University History and Education Professor, Sam Wineburg, states this. "We need to raise citizens who ask themselves, 'is this true? Who is saying so? What's the nature of the evidence?'" Wineburg goes on to say that in this way, "History is a training ground for democracy."

On a personal note, I am a Christian who prays daily. My faith is central to who I am and this particular topic is of deep importance to me. While a History major at Asbury College in the early 1980s, I began grappling with different interpretations on whether or not America is a Christian Nation. This is a complicated issue, which may come down to how one defines "Christian." It was important in my personal journey for me to realize that my faith does not rest on whether or not America is "Christian."

I was drawn to Minnesota because of the way this State values and supports its past. I think all of us can agree that history is complex and in some cases people will need to agree to disagree. But always, the Minnesota Historical Society will strive to fulfill its mission with integrity.

Again, I would be happy to meet in person with members of the Minnesota Legislative Prayer Caucus.

Sincerely,



Kent Whitworth
Director and Chief Executive Officer