

October 2000

Senator Joseph Lieberman
Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lieberman:

I was distressed by the comments you made recently during a speech at a Detroit, Michigan church where you called upon Americans to “reaffirm our faith and renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God and God’s purposes.”

You also suggested that the Constitution of the United States “guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.”

These sorts of remarks are inaccurate and inappropriate in an American election campaign. You are seeking the nation’s second-highest elected office where you may have the responsibility of representing all Americans – not just those of religious belief. Tens of millions of us describe ourselves as Atheists, agnostics, skeptics – people of no religious faith. We pay taxes, “play by the rules” as Bill Clinton likes to say, and many of us vote. We find it offensive that major political figures preach at us, commanding us to worship, and then suggest that our nation does not enjoy the constitutional protections of the First Amendment’s establishment clause.

Americans are fortunate to have both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. The latter was an important component of the American Revolution, when the states of the new federal union began to “disestablish” their official churches. Jefferson wrote of a “wall of separation” between church and state. Many of the Founders rejected Christian and other religious dogmas, and warned against the tyranny of religious rule. The U.S. Supreme Court has strictly limited the role government may play in promoting religious beliefs and groups. We rightfully prohibit organized and coercive sectarian prayer and other religious rituals from our public schools. We force no one to attend a house of worship, compel no one to financially support religion, nor do we censor those who questions doctrines and beliefs.

If any group should be sensitive to the need for separation of church and state, and the freedom from religion, it is your own heritage, Judaism – a minority religion in America. In the history of western culture, no single religious group has been persecuted, excluded and stereotyped in such a

despicable fashion by the majority religion. Perhaps you might recall the case of Wayne and Sue Willis, a Jewish family in Troy, Alabama. Their story was reported last April 7, 2000 in the *St. Petersburg Times* newspaper. Their 14-year-old son, Paul, received punishment for disruptive behavior for refusing an assignment, which was to “write an essay on ‘why Jesus Loves Me’.”

“Paul and his brother were harassed with ‘Jew Boy’ taunts and swastikas on their lockers.”

This is why we have separation of church and state.

It is inappropriate for you, or any candidate, to “preach at” the American people. I urge you to be more inclusive, tolerant and broad-minded; and acknowledge the fact that millions of Americans exercise their right to not believe in religious creeds and deities. As one of these Americans, I urge you to speak for the separation of church and state – our freedom FROM religion, a principle that benefits both religious and nonreligious citizens.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

(name and address)