

Atheist invocation at the Grand Junction City Council meeting on June 17, 2020, by Anne Landman, Founder and Board Member at Large of Western Colorado Atheists and Freethinkers:

I'm here representing Western Colorado Atheists and Freethinkers. Our group was founded in 2007, and since none of you were on City Council back in 2008, you may not know our group was responsible for Council adopting the invocation policy that's currently in place that brought me here tonight. Instead of limiting who can say the invocation to members of certain religions, the current policy invites everyone the right to say the invocation regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof, and it also gives that right to individuals as well as groups. Back in 2009, after the City adopted its current policy, I put my name in the hat to say the invocation, and lo and behold, 11 years later here I am.

It's not lost on me that in other communities around the country that when atheists like me have asked to say the invocation, they've had to go to court and fight for the right to do it. We should be proud that in Grand Junction this isn't the case. Maybe one day we'll see an end to discrimination against people based on their belief systems, or lack thereof.

I want to give you an idea of who atheists in our community are. I did a quick survey of our group's supporters and found that atheists in our community include:

Grocery workers, truck drivers, registered nurses, security guards and other "essential" workers who have been putting their lives on the line for the rest of us amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Grand Junction atheists are teachers, translators, artists, software developers, mental health and addictions counselors. They manufacturer parts for vehicles that enable vehicles to move.. Many atheists own tax-generating enterprises.

Atheists sit on the boards of local businesses and community-benefit nonprofits and serve in local elected offices. Atheists organize some of the biggest long-time traditional parades in Grand Junction; they clean up roads, help organize the Special Olympics; serve food to the hungry, volunteer to teach inmates at the jail; atheists help clean and support the Homeward Bound homeless shelter, donate generously to the Mesa County Public Library, the Community Food Bank, the Roice Hurst Animal Shelter, a cancer survivor program at St. Mary's, the botanical gardens and more. Atheists in our community volunteer time to cook and distribute food to hungry people; help immigrants get out of detention centers legally, and shop preferentially at locally-owned businesses over big box stores. Many of us have given away all or part part of our CARES ACT funds to benefit the less fortunate in our community, and much more. In short, atheists are a helpful, selfless, loving, highly moral and community-oriented bunch of people, who contribute substantially to the greater good of our City and make it the truly wonderful place to live that it is.

Thank you to all of you City Councilors for giving so generously of your time to benefit our City. We know you don't get paid much for all the time and effort you put in to considering so many un-sexy topics like road repairs, traffic mgmt, water, drainage and sewage systems, so the rest of us can enjoy without a thought the high quality of life these systems bring us all.

Since 2008 our group has been pushing City Council to honor, in both letter and spirit, the separation of church and state in the the First Amendment to the Constitution, AND make more efficient use of taxpayer-funded meeting time by eliminating the invocation entirely,³ in keeping with that spirit, I won't waste any more time. I'll just let you get down to work so you can get out of

here as early as possible tonight ... **because you deserve it.**
Thank you.