Invocation, March 22, 2016, present to the Jacksonville FL City Council

Good afternoon,

Thank you members of the Jacksonville City Council for this opportunity to give the invocation prior to today’s City Council meeting.

Before I start the invocation, we’ve had a bad week around the world. Please keep in your hearts and minds our good friends and allies in Europe, and in particular, Belgium.

And now for the invocation:

In 1903, a poem called The New Colossus, written by Emma Lazarus, was inscribed on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the lower level of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. In part, it said:

Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Many people, past and present, have accepted the invitation on that bronze plaque. They come from a multitude of cultures. Some of their descendants are here today in this room.

We are gathered today, both religious and non-religious, young and old, liberal and conservative, with the shared belief that we must treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity, and equally important, treat each other as colleagues in the day to day business of living, together and amongst, each other.

Each of us in this room is a member of a minority in some way, whether it be a minority view related to politics, religion, society, culture, or any other aspect in which we may be regarded as different. It’s a very lonely feeling when you are regarded as - different.

At the same time, each of us is also a part of a majority. Each of us, in some way, is part of something big. It’s when we are wearing our majority hats that we need to be most mindful of how we treat others. We must pledge our best efforts to help one another, and to defend the rights of all of the citizens of this city.

This afternoon I invoke humanity’s potential to use intellect, empathy, and cooperation as a way in which to make this city a great and peaceful place to coexist.

Today I also invoke the freedoms guaranteed in our Constitution, especially the First Amendment, as a compass to govern by: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech; or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble; and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

And lastly, I invoke the essence of teamwork and collaboration to help us put aside inclinations to fear each other, and instead, find common aspirations and goals where we can work together for the betterment of our city.

As a humanist and an atheist, it is a great feeling of inclusion to be up here. It is my hope that you will seek out representatives of all worldviews for future invocations.

Thank you.

Notes (not spoken at council meeting):

Credit needs to go to the following people:

\* Emma Lazarus, author of the poem The New Colossus, part of which was used in this invocation.

\* James Madison, author of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, all of which was used in this invocation.

\* Herb Silverman, part of the first paragraph of his 2006 invocation was used in this invocation.

\* Americans United for Separation of Church and State sample invocation for their Operation Inclusion project. Their invocation was not used, but was inspirational in creating my invocation.

\* Ken Hurley, for suggestions on what to include in my invocation