News



U.S. President Joe Biden pauses as he sits alongside House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Louisiana, during the annual National Prayer Breakfast at the U.S. Capitol in Washington Feb. 1, 2024. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

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At the National Prayer Breakfast Feb. 1, President Joe Biden called for prayers for a peaceful resolution of conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, and he urged Americans to be united in the face of challenges.

In a speech to members of Congress at the interfaith event, Biden, who is Catholic, mentioned the fruits of the Holy Spirit, including peace.

"Not only do we pray for peace, we are actively working for peace, security and dignity for the Israeli people and the Palestinian people," Biden said, adding he continues to work for the return of hostages and an "enduring" peaceful, two-state resolution to the conflict following Hamas Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

"Just as we worked for peace, security and dignity for the Ukrainian people, as they show incredible resolve and resilience against (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's aggression," he added, "we must continue to help. The challenge of our times reminds us of our responsibility as a nation to help each other, just and lasting peace, deliver it, abroad, and here at home. That's why we're fighting against the rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia here in the United States and all forms of hate, including those against Arab Americans and South Asian Americans."

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Biden also delivered a plea for a renewed spirit of national unity. He said that the idea of America is a calling to "stand against hate" as we are all "created equal."

Noting the event took place in Statuary Hall — a room in the U.S. Capitol that housed the House of Representatives before the Civil War, but after British troops burned the U.S. Capitol in 1814 — Biden said, "Here, here we are in this room, among the statues of heroes who have shaped our history."

"That's my prayer, to remember who we are. We're the United States of America," he said. "There's nothing, and I mean this sincerely, nothing beyond our capacity if we act together."

Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli, who is Catholic, performed at the event. Biden expressed his admiration of the singer, calling himself an "unadulterated fan." House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Louisiana, also expressed his admiration for the singer, telling Bocelli, "We wept on the front row."

The event's 2024 honorary co-chairs were Reps. Frank Mrvan, D-Indiana, and Tracey Mann, R-Kansas.

The National Prayer Breakfast was previously organized by the International Foundation, a Christian group also using the name the Fellowship Foundation, or sometimes the nickname "The Family."

But in 2023, the event was reorganized after concerns among some lawmakers that the event was becoming too divisive following several controversial moments at the gathering. One such moment took place in 2013 when Dr. Ben Carson delivered remarks criticizing then-President Barack Obama's health care policies while he was sitting nearby.