

# Irish politicians face ejection from the chamber and loss of pay if they don't stand for prayers

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The Irish parliament has approved a requirement mandating TDs remain standing during the prayers that open each Dáil sitting.

[Today FM](#) reported that TDs can be subject to disciplinary action, including being thrown out of the chamber and losing a day's pay, if they refuse to stand.

During a debate on whether the Irish Parliament should discontinue the practice of holding prayers at the start of each sitting, several TDs said they would refuse to stand for prayers.

Bríd Smith TD said, "I'm not standing, no matter what I'm told to do, because my religion is my business and is not up for public scrutiny."

Another said it was "baffling" that they would have to stand.

Following the debate on the prayer's purpose and much criticism of its suitability to a republic, the current practice was amended to include a half minute for "reflection" in addition to the current prayer, but secularist campaigners in Ireland say the situation is now worse than it was before.

Ireland and the UK are the only European parliaments to start their formal business with a prayer.

Atheist Ireland [offered its thanks](#) to the TDs who "spoke in favour of separation of Church and State", ahead of the vote on Thursday. The secularist organisation said that while they were "still a minority in the Dáil, they reflect the changing mood of the Irish people."

Atheist Ireland vigorously rejected the requirement that TDs be made to stand for prayers and have also spoken out strongly against forcing the Ceann Comhairle (speaker) of the Irish parliament's lower house to read the prayers, calling that requirement an "unconstitutional religious test".

During the debate Ruth Coppinger TD also challenged the requirement on the speaker to read the prayer: "Can we ever have a Ceann Comhairle who is not a Christian?"

"At a time when the rest of society out there is demanding an absolute separation of Church and State the Dáil decides to embed an archaic practice," Coppinger added.

Catherine Murphy TD questioned whether prayers at the start of the parliament's business "reflects the non-denominational nature of our Constitution".

She said she "cannot support the retention of the prayer".

Atheist Ireland said the new time for reflection was not an improvement on the current situation, but "makes the situation worse".

They challenged the retention of the prayer's current wording, which says that "every word and work of ours may always begin" with God.

In the UK Parliament sittings in both Houses begin with Christian prayers led by a Church of England bishop. MPs and Peers stand for prayers facing the wall behind them – a practice thought to have developed due to the difficulty Members would historically have faced of kneeling to pray while wearing a sword. Prayers are voluntary but serve as an antiquated seat reservation system on busy days.

In the Scottish Parliament, Tuesday afternoon sessions begin with 'Time for Reflection', with faith representatives invited in to addresses members for up to four minutes, in a similar format to Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day'.

The Northern Ireland Assembly begins formal business with a period of two minutes of silent prayer or contemplation. The Welsh Assembly has adopted no such rituals.

In the 2016 [secular manifesto](#) released by the National Secular Society, the NSS said that "Parliament should reflect the country as it is today and remove acts of worship" from its formal business.

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