



## Focus on Religious Freedom

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### What is Religious Freedom and What's at Stake if We Lose It

Religious liberty is increasingly under attack by those who believe it cannot and should not coexist with our other freedoms. However, religious freedom is a God given, fundamental human right and American value enshrined in our Constitution and protected by the Bill of Rights.

Freedom of religion protects the conscience of all people since it allows us to think, express and act upon what we deeply believe. This freedom of conscience is critical to the health of a diverse society by allowing different faiths and beliefs to flourish. "We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege; let them worship (or not) how, where, or what they may," said Church of Latter-day Saints leaders.<sup>(1)</sup>

The American Founders understood the importance of religion for human, social, and political flourishing. That's why they styled religious freedom as the First Freedom and the foundation upon which all other freedoms are guaranteed and protected and without which the new Republic would fail.

***"The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." - George Washington, 1789***

Americans supported the Founders' understanding of religious liberty when they overwhelmingly endorsed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the International Religious Freedom Act then signed by President Bill Clinton in the 1990s.

However, a direct denial of conscience rights occurred on Sept. 8, 2016, when the chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued this statement: "(t)he phrases 'religious liberty' and 'religious freedom' (are) code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia (and) Christian supremacy ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

([inhofe.senate.gov](http://inhofe.senate.gov), 9/16/20; [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org](http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org),<sup>(1)</sup>; [americancharter.org](http://americancharter.org). 11/1/19<sup>(2)</sup>)

***"If we lose freedom here, there is no place to escape to.  
This is the last stand on earth." - President Ronald Reagan***

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### Losing Religious Freedom as We Know It - Part 1

Bishops, Ministers, Rabbis, and all people of good will who value Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Conscience, and Freedom of Thought, are alarmed at the recent passage of the misnamed "Equality Act" and the impending "Do No Harm Act" that in reality promote 'inequality' and will 'do much harm.' "This legislation seeks to change what is true, what is scientific, and what pertains to free speech and religious liberty," wrote Msgr. Charles Pope. <sup>(1)</sup>

***"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedom, it will be because we destroyed ourselves." Abraham Lincoln***

While the stated goal of the "Equality Act" is to amend existing civil rights laws to ban LGBTQ discrimination in the workforce, housing, education, and other areas of life, in reality, this "inequality act" would wrest special privileges for sexual orientation and gender identity. It seeks to impose an "administrative conscience" <sup>(2)</sup> which would supersede and destroy individual conscience rights.

The Equality Act will:

" eliminate women's privacy & safety, forcing them to share public bathrooms, locker rooms, showers, and even battered women's shelters with biological males. (It) penalizes female athletes by allowing biological men to compete in women's sports ..."

" erode parental rights and position the government over churches and other faith-based institutions, potentially dictating how their facilities are used, who they hire, and punishing them for not affirming their view of human sexuality that directly contradicts orthodox biblical teaching."

" politicize the medical profession and denies biological reality..."

"dramatically expand abortion access and jeopardizes long-standing federal conscience laws." <sup>(3)</sup>

**"The Equality Act explicitly exempts itself from the requirements & protections of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act" <sup>(4)</sup> which was unanimously approved in 1993, signed by Pres. Clinton.**

"We are at a critical point in our culture. Either we are going to stand up and insist on reality or have an alternative 'reality' imposed on us...Either we are going to fight for our religious liberty and freedom of speech - and ultimately, freedom of thought - or they will be taken from us," wrote Msgr. Charles Pope. <sup>(5)</sup>

(ncregister.com, 2/22/21(1)(5); ncregister.com, 2/25/21(2); prnewswire.com, 2/19/21(3); catholicvote.org, 2/25/21(4); firstthings.com, 1/25/21; deseret.com, 1/8/21; thehill.com, 6/8/18)

***"It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself." - Thomas Jefferson***

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### **Losing Religious Freedom as We Know It - Part 2**

***"The Constitutional Freedom of Religion is the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights." - Thomas Jefferson***

Two anti-religious freedom/anti-freedom bills that lingered in the House and Senate for over two years are likely to be signed into law soon unless all Americans learn about and oppose these threats to freedom.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recently wrote:

**"The Equality Act**, passed by the House of Representatives on Feb. 25, does the exact opposite and needs to be opposed. Instead of respecting differences in beliefs about marriage and sexuality, the Equality Act would discriminate against people of faith.... (It) would impose sweeping regulations to the detriment of society as a whole.... In brief, the Equality Act will:

- \* ***Regulate thought, belief, and speech***
- \* ***Explicitly retract religious freedom***
- \* ***Threaten charitable services***
- \* ***Hinder quality health care***
- \* ***Exclude people from various career paths and livelihoods***
- \* ***Endanger privacy*** <sup>(1)</sup>

"Whatever crumb of religious liberty that might be left after enactment of the Equality Act, would likely be swept up by the **Do No Harm Act**, a more comprehensive bill that would effectively render RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act) null and void." <sup>(2)</sup> "The Do No Harm Act would strip away the rights of millions of Americans who, because of their faith, are pro-life or support traditional marriage." <sup>(3)</sup>

Individual business owners could be forced to participate in, and thus endorse, speech and events they believe are morally objectionable. For example, a baker may be forced to create a cake design he finds morally objectionable; a florist, photographer, or tee-shirt designer could be forced to similarly design a product that violates his conscience or religious beliefs. Each of these situations have come before the Courts and each time, the business owner's freedom of religion was protected by RFRA.

"This bill would strip the heart out" of religious freedom law, wrote Dr. Doug Laycock, Un. of Virginia. <sup>(4)</sup>

"Religion's vast benefit to the whole of American society will only last so long as people of faith maintain the freedom to exercise religion, not just in their home or place of worship, but at work and in the wider community," said Matt Sharp at the Alliance Defending Freedom. <sup>(5)</sup>

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### **Be Silent No More! Contact your Elected Officials:**

Call the Capital Switchboard at 202-224-3121 to be connected to any Representative or Senator's office. Find Representative's emails at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) Find Senator's emails at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

(ncregister.com, 2/22/21(1); firstthings.com, 1/25/21(2); thehill.com, 6/8/18(3); deseret.com, 1/8/21(4)(5))

***"Remember Civil and Religious Liberty always go together:  
if the foundation of the one be sapped, the other will fall of course." - Alexander Hamilton***