

ESTABLISHMENT VS. RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

The following article written by Bill Donohue was published by Newsmax on March 24.

The two Democrats running for president are rarely asked to address religious liberty issues, and that is because everyone knows that neither Hillary Clinton nor Sen. Bernie Sanders places much of a premium on such matters.

The three Republican candidates are more likely to be questioned on this subject, yet none has been asked to comment on the most pressing religious liberty legislation currently being considered: the bill that recently passed both houses of the Georgia legislature. It's time they were asked.

The Georgia bill is similar to the laws passed by 30 other states. Essentially, it would give Georgia the same rights as enumerated in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) at the federal level.

That bill placed a heavy burden on the federal government whenever it sought to override religious liberty objections: It had to prove a "compelling government interest" before it interfered with religious rights.

The majority of states adopted their own RFRA laws because the protections afforded by the bill signed by President Clinton in 1993 did not extend to the states.

There was little controversy over this issue until Indiana sought to implement its own RFRA law last year. LGBT groups objected, claiming that there should be no religious exemption for anyone who refused to service a same-sex event, even if the objections were religiously grounded.

Gov. Mike Pence, under pressure to veto the law, signed a revised version of it, over protests from the NCAA (it is headquartered in Indiana). At the time, most of the sports establishment stayed out of it, but this time Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal is being lobbied hard by the Atlanta Braves, the Atlanta Falcons, and the Atlanta Hawks.

Most important, the NFL has jumped on board, threatening not to award Atlanta with the Super Bowl: Atlanta is a finalist for the 2019 and 2020 Super Bowls, along with New Orleans, Miami, and Tampa.

As Kyle Wingfield of the Atlanta Journal Constitution has said, the NFL is not only entering into highly political territory, it is hypocritical: Louisiana and Florida already have RFRA laws, so why is Georgia being singled out for retribution? It could also be asked: Where are all the horror stories of gay rights being eviscerated in the 30 states that have their own RFRA laws?

None of this should be enough to stop Donald Trump, Sen. Ted Cruz, or Gov. John Kasich from taking the side of religious liberty. But opposition to the bill is not coming merely from the sports world, or from a coalition of left-wing groups represented by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. No, it is being led by the corporate establishment.

A recently founded non-profit group, Georgia Prospers, has organized scores of businesses to work against the religious liberty bill, HB 757. Here are some of the luminaries:

AIG, Apple, AT&T, Bain, Bank of America, Atlanta Convention & Bureau, Coca-Cola, Cox Enterprises, Cushman & Wakefield, Deloitte & Touche, Delta, Ernst & Young, Google, Home Depot, Honeywell, Hyatt Regency, IBM, InterContinental Hotels, Marriott, McKesson, Mercedes-Benz, Metro Atlanta Chamber, Microsoft, Nordstrom, PNC, Porsche, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ruth's Chris, Sheraton, SunTrust, Tishman Speyer, Turner

Broadcasting, Twitter, Unilever, UPS, Verizon, Wells Fargo.

Oh, yes, the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta has also sided against religious liberty.

Now Disney and Marvel Studios have pledged to move their Georgia offices elsewhere if the bill becomes law. Walt Disney must be turning over in his grave –his child-friendly empire is more gay-friendly than it is religion-friendly. Pushing for Hollywood to work against religious liberty is the Human Rights Campaign, the gay activist organization.

It is one of the more astounding social transformations of our time: corporate America has gotten into bed with gay activists. These elites maintain that when there is a conflict between LGBT rights and religious rights, the latter should yield. Which means that sincerely held religious convictions about the sanctity of marriage, properly understood, should no longer be honored by the state.

In real life terms, this means that the government has a right to force practicing Christians to service a gay wedding event. Similarly, it has the authority to punish the Knights of Columbus if they do not rent their halls to two homosexuals seeking to marry.

The Republican candidates should no longer be allowed to pontificate in general about the religious exercise provision of the First Amendment. They ought to be asked to choose: Do they side with the left-wing and corporate establishment, or with men and women of faith?