

TRUMP WILL BE RELIGION-FRIENDLY

From The President's Desk

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None of the three biggest vote getters in the primaries—Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders—are known for their deeply rooted religious convictions. Trump is Presbyterian and Clinton is a Methodist, and like many mainline Protestants, they are religion-lite; Sanders is an admitted secularist. What makes Trump different from Clinton and Sanders is his religion-friendly posture, something the faithful from every religious community can welcome.

There are certain advantages to being religion-lite and religion-friendly at the same time. Having no strong personal stake in the conflict between religious liberty and the rights embroiled in abortion, marriage, education, housing, and healthcare, there is good reason to believe that Trump can be counted on to be religion-friendly.

Moreover, he won 52 percent of the Catholic vote (he did much better among practicing Catholics) and 81 percent of the evangelical vote. He is not likely to let his constituents down.

Trump is a businessman, not a culture warrior. As such, he was never seriously engaged in any of the fights that animate those of a more orthodox religious stripe. Take abortion. On October 24, 1999, Trump was asked by Tim Russert on "Meet the Press" if his support for abortion rights would extend to a defense of partial-birth abortion. "I'm very pro-choice," Trump said, adding that he would oppose a ban on partial-birth

abortion.

Within no time, Trump reversed himself. "After the show," he said, "I consulted with two doctors I respect and, upon learning more about this procedure, I have concluded that I would indeed support a ban." His remark was published three months later in his book, *The America We Deserve*. This was the beginning of his evolution on this subject.

Trump has consistently said that he will appoint pro-life judges to the federal bench, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. Indeed, the month before the election he pledged to Catholics that he will work with us, "helping the ongoing growth of the pro-life cause."

On the collision between gay rights and religious liberty, Trump is less specific. He is welcoming to the gay community, assuring them, properly so, that he will not tolerate bullying, but he is also choosing cabinet members that are religion-friendly.

For example, Sen. Jeff Sessions (attorney general), Betsy DeVos (education), Rep. Tom Price (health and human services), and Ben Carson (housing and urban development), are all known for refusing to subordinate religious liberty to the gay rights agenda.

There is one more important consideration. To the extent that Trump makes appointing pro-life judges a priority, he is likely to select men and women who will honor our right to religious liberty; competing rights will not be eviscerated, but they will not eclipse our First Amendment right.

Trump is particularly good on school choice. His choice of Betsy DeVos as education secretary proves his commitment to academic excellence and religious liberty. It would be hard to find someone with a more stellar record of supporting school choice than her. That she is dedicated to including religious schools in her effort is indisputable. Indeed, she played a

prominent role in helping Mike Pence succeed with a voucher plan in Indiana that was decidedly religion-friendly.

Ben Carson is a decent man with deep religious roots. As the new Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, he will be positioned to advance the cause of religious liberty. He can be expected to ensure that faith-based programs that are tied to the department's block grants are not burdened with contrived church-and-state regulations. This will put a stop to the kinds of machinations sponsored by the Obama team.

In fact, the Obama administration's war on religious liberty, especially its attack on Catholic institutions, is coming to an end. The draconian Health and Human Services mandate will be dismantled by Secretary Price. Trump said as much when he noted that Hillary Clinton was aligned against the Little Sisters of the Poor. "That is a hostility to religious liberty you will never see in a Trump administration," he said.

The religious rights of men and women in the armed services will also spike under Trump. We know this not simply by citing what he says, but by reading what his adversaries are saying about him. Mikey Weinstein, who heads the Military Religion Freedom Foundation, is the most vociferous enemy of religious liberty in the military, and he is up in arms over Trump. That is a very good sign.

President Ronald Reagan was not known to be a particularly religious man, yet he was one of the most religion-friendly presidents we've had in recent memory. He was the first to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and he was a champion of the pro-life cause.

All indications are that Trump will be more like Reagan, which is a good omen. When he is attacked for standing up for religious liberty—and he will be—it will be up to us to defend him. We plan to do so with vigor.