

5 Ways Trump Has Strengthened Your Religious Freedom

Building on his best-selling book *God and Donald Trump* (Frontline, 2017), best-selling author Stephen E. Strang explores what the Trump administration has done so far in his new book, *Trump Aftershock*.

Strang explains how Trump captured the largest evangelical vote in American history by aligning with conservative-Christian values. True to his word, Trump acted on these principles after being elected, making moves that benefited religious groups across the country.

1. The Trump administration issued the Guidance on Federal Law Protections for religious liberty.

In October 2017, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued 20 principles of religious liberty to guide administrative agencies and executive departments in addressing the religious freedoms of Americans. This was in response to an executive order by Trump that promoted free speech and religious liberty. The guidance ensures that no one is forced to choose between living out their faith and complying with the law.

2. Houses of worship can now access FEMA.

For decades, faith-based groups have strived to gain access to funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA previously did not accept applications for disaster aid from houses of worship that have been damaged from natural disasters. But in January 2018, the Trump administration announced that FEMA would follow new funding rules. Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples in hurricane-affected areas could now apply for FEMA relief.

“Churches in Texas should be entitled to reimbursement from

FEMA Relief Funds for helping victims of Hurricane Harvey (just like others),” Trump tweeted earlier in the year.

3. The HHS formed a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division.

Under the Trump administration, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) created the Division of Conscience and Religious Freedom. This allows health care workers to refuse to provide birth control, sterilizations, assisted suicide and abortions because of religious conscience. The division reverses an Obama-era policy that failed to protect health care workers who faced compromising their religious convictions when called to carry out certain procedures.

“President Trump promised the American people that his administration would vigorously uphold the rights of conscience and religious freedom. That promise is being kept,” HHS Secretary Eric Hargan said.

4. “Respect for Religious Liberty” was added to the U.S. Attorney’s Manual.

The United States Attorney’s Manual (USAM) added a new section titled “Respect for Religious Liberty” that enforces religious liberty protections that were laid out by the attorney general in a Memorandum for All Executive Departments and Agencies. As of January 2018, the manual guides those involved in religious liberty cases to comply with the rights established under the Free Exercise Clause, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act or the Establishment Clause. It also directs Justice Department components to refer to the 20 principles of religious liberty (see No. 1).

5. Trump established the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

On the National Day of Prayer in May 2018, Trump signed an executive order that established the White House Faith and

Opportunity Initiative. The initiative aims to support faith-based businesses by ensuring they have equal opportunities for grants, programs, contracts and other forms of federal funding. It will also protect people of faith who are marginalized from the public square.

This move cemented Trump's support from American evangelicals. Strang writes in *Trump Aftershock*:

"Trump buoyed the spirits of evangelicals when he made a strong appeal during the National Day of Prayer for a return to God and a restoration of religious liberty. That event convinced many evangelicals who were looking for assurance of Trump's commitment that this president would give his support to the issues that were most important to them." {eo}

This article is based on Trump Aftershock (Frontline, 2018) by Stephen E. Strang. Strang is the best-selling author of God and Donald Trump, which was brandished by the president during his appearance at Davos World Economic Forum in 2017. The CEO and founder of Charisma Media, Strang was voted by Time magazine as one of the most influential evangelicals in America. He has traveled to more than 50 countries, interviewed four U.S. presidents, and has been featured on Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, CBN, Family Talk With Dr. Dobson and The .