

A ‘Resign’ of the Times: Angie’s List CEO Quits After Religious Freedom Flap

Angie’s can take one thing off its list—CEO Bill Oesterle. After a rough few weeks at the center of the Indiana RFRA debate, the Angie’s List boss surprised everyone by stepping down. The decision, which comes less than a month after conservatives launched a nationwide boycott against his company, caught the local business community off guard—especially since Oesterle had been at the helm since he co-founded the subscription service in 1995.

Of course, his rockiest time at the wheel was this spring, when the one-time GOP advisor gambled his company’s reputation on the Left’s view of religious liberty—namely, that Christians shouldn’t have any. Oesterle jumped on the Left’s misinformation bandwagon, using his company as leverage in the fight against religious liberty.

At one point, he threatened to pull a multimillion dollar office building from Indianapolis over the measure—which, reporters later discovered, was on hold for other reasons. Turns out, the city was already worried that Angie’s List’s track record (specifically that it has never posted an annual profit) was a bad investment. When Indianapolis didn’t bite on the idea—which would have cost it millions of dollars in subsidies—Angie’s List had no choice to put the plans on the backburner.

Oesterle’s public reasons for leaving the company are to “re-enter politics”—although the last several weeks would suggest he never left them. Feeling the pain of a boycott, the pinch of another downward year (the Indianapolis Star says the business “relies heavily on investor money to stay afloat”),

and a public decision to put his company at odds with the First Amendment almost certainly contributed to the sudden departure. Still, Oesterle says, his goal is to reverse the “shellacking” Indiana took in the RFRA debate.

“I can maybe do some things to help resolve some of the state’s issues.” His position as CEO, he explained, is “incompatible” with his political involvement—a view that was no doubt reinforced courtesy of *former* subscribers. Even when Governor Mike Pence (R-Indiana) watered down the language protecting the freedom of belief, Oesterle complained that he didn’t go far enough. “I abhor discrimination, I just do. I certainly support religious freedom ... right up to the point that (it) discriminates against somebody else and actively does so.” Like so many faux religious liberty supporters, he wants to protect everyone of discrimination but the true victims: men and women of faith.

That shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone familiar with his work environment. He happily employs a person whose work promoting sexual bondage was featured in her book *Spanking City Hall*. “It’s kind of a safe place for her,” Bill says nonchalantly. Melyssa Hubbard, who works in the sales department at Angie’s List, told reporters, “I wish every place on earth was like this ... Bill creates platforms for people to self-actualize.” Unless, of course, you want to actualize as an orthodox Christian.

Meanwhile, Oesterle, who would deny the timing of his resignation as anything but coincidental, is mulling a primary challenge to Indiana Governor Mike Pence (R). If so, both men will need a significant boost before then. Governor Pence, who may never recover from raising a white flag on religious freedom, is watching his base of support implode. Just since January, his approval rating dropped from 62 percent to 43 percent post-RFRA caving. Obviously, surrender isn’t just wrong—it’s unpopular.

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