

Conscience Isn't Wanted in This State Legislature

If the government wants to boost jobs, it ought to stop driving people out of the ones they have! In places like North Carolina, help is wanted—but conscience isn't. At least six offices are scrambling to find new magistrates now that the state has made violating personal beliefs a condition of employment.

When the courts struck down the Tar Heels' 2012 marriage amendment, North Carolina's Administrative Office of the Court decided to chuck the First Amendment along with it, issuing a decree that officials would either perform same-sex "marriages" or clean out their offices. Of course, the great irony here is that liberals have always encouraged the courts to impose their personal views on the law. Now, when judges want to recuse themselves because of them, the Left screams "prejudice!"

Like other states, North Carolina is desperately trying to strike a balance between court's order for same-sex "marriage" with religious liberty. And so far, the biggest obstacle is their own governor. In a gutless move, Pat McCrory (R) vetoed a perfectly reasonable opt-out for the state's officials. Under the measure passed by the House and Senate, magistrates could exempt themselves from same-sex "weddings" if they agreed to recuse themselves from *all* weddings for at least six months. If a judge declined to officiate, another one would be brought in to perform the service—meaning that no harm would be done to the state or the couples by this law.

As the bill's sponsor, state Senator Phil Berger (R), pointed out, "If a same-sex couple wants to get married in North Carolina, they will have the opportunity to get married in North Carolina." But, he qualified, "Just because someone

takes a job with the government does not mean they give up their First Amendment rights.”

Apparently, Governor McCrory disagrees. In a garbled statement after his veto (which, not-so-coincidentally, came hours after Cargo Transporters threatened to take \$20 million of business out of the state), he used some flimsy excuse about state officials needing to uphold their oath of office. “We are a nation and a state of laws ... No public official who voluntarily swears to support and defend the Constitution and to discharge all duties of their office should be exempt from upholding that oath.”

First of all, natural marriage was the law in North Carolina, as decided by a whopping 61 percent of voters. The only people ignoring that law are the activist judges who overturned it! Secondly, the Constitution McCrory claims to be defending is built on the religious liberty that his veto bulldozes! As if it weren’t enough that the courts stripped the people’s voice, now the government wants to punish their belief as well. “What this bill does is provide a balancing act,” Rep. Dean Arp explained, “that ensures that marriages are performed in a blind fashion.”

It’s the perfect solution—or so leaders thought. Unfortunately for America, the Left isn’t satisfied with compromise, even genuinely sensible ones like North Carolina’s. Their goal is to tyrannize and terrorize until the country fully submits. As a result, 2.3 percent of the population gets 100 percent of the protection. Once again, liberals want “tolerance” but refuse to give it. It’s like driving around with a “coexist” bumper sticker while you run over people with different beliefs.

“For many people, marriage is a religious institution and weddings are a religious sacrament,” the University of Illinois’s Robin Wilson writes. “For them, assisting with marriage ceremonies has a religious significance that

commercial services that are subject to non-discrimination bans, like ordering burgers and hailing taxis, simply do not.”

The North Carolina Senate understands that, which is why they voted 32-16 to override the governor’s veto. The failure, they say, is on the part of the government for not making an effort to shield *everyone*. As early as tomorrow, the House is expected to try to clear the hurdle they need to make S.B. 2 law. But they need your help. The North Carolina Family Policy Institute has been working around the clock to find members bold enough to do what the people asked: Respect their beliefs.

If you’re a Tar Heel—or know someone who is—ask them to call or email their state representatives today. “Conscience,” James Madison said, “is the most sacred of all property.” Don’t let the government steal yours.

Tony Perkins *is President of the Washington, Family Research Council.*