

Is Civil Disobedience the Next Step for Conservative Republicans?

While some Republican presidential candidates urged action to counter the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling legalizing gay marriage, grass-roots activists at a conservative conference this weekend said they preferred to focus on limiting the damage.

Several presidential hopefuls at the Western Conservative Summit in the swing state of Colorado called for constitutional amendments or civil disobedience to turn back the Court's landmark ruling on Friday.

But Christian conservatives who have been on the front lines of a battle to stop the advance of gay marriage indicated it was time to cut their losses. Rather, they would prefer to ensure that the ruling would not restrict their ability to practice their religion as they saw fit.

"Our first response is moving at a federal and state level to protect religious freedom," said Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, a Christian conservative group. "You have to secure your base camp."

The calls for action against the ruling came from presidential candidates keen to show their conservative credentials as they compete in a crowded Republican field for the party nomination for the November 2016 election.

Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum blamed his fellow Republicans for not banning gay marriage nationwide, as he tried to do a decade ago in Congress.

"We have been bullied into silence," Santorum said on Friday.

"We're losing because we're not trying to win."

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee said states that disagreed with the decision could prevent it from taking effect, even though conservative states like Texas and Kentucky began issuing same-sex marriage licenses after Friday's ruling.

Civil disobedience is also an option, Huckabee said.

"In all of our lives there comes moments where have to decide whether we obey God or we obey a decision we believe is unlawful," he said.

'Live and Let Live'

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, a likely presidential candidate who was due to speak at the conference later on Saturday, wants a constitutional amendment to let states decide whether or not to legalize gay marriage. Texas Senator Ted Cruz said in Iowa on Saturday that the constitution should be amended so voters could recall Supreme Court justices.

Those ideas would seem to find fertile ground at the Western Conservative Summit, where attendees can find pamphlets advertising "conversion therapy" for gays and lesbians.

But the head of the group that organized the conference said that while many people attending are disappointed by the ruling, they respect the right of gays and lesbians to live their lives.

"Live and let live has been said repeatedly, and that is part of the genius of America," John Andrews, director of the conservative Centennial Institute, told Reuters.

Some said the ruling was irrelevant so long as it did not interfere with their religion.

"Our federal laws will be enforced now for a little while, but

God's law will be enforced eternally by the one who will judge us all in the end," Colorado state representative Gordon Klingenschmitt told Reuters.

The head of a Republican gay rights group that was denied a booth at the conference said his party should stop fighting a battle it has already lost.

"Now this is the law of the land, what can we do to ensure that there is religious freedom for all and there is equality of marriage under the law for all?" said George Gramer, president of the Colorado Log Cabin Republicans.

Others said their party should move on entirely.

"The gays aren't trying to take away our country," said retiree Carol Beckler, a former state legislature candidate. "They're good people."

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