

President Trump Follows Through on His Promise to Protect Religious Liberty

In a ceremony in the Rose Garden at the White House, President Donald Trump signed an executive action to protect religious liberty. He was joined by a number of faith leaders from around the country and Vice President Mike Pence.

"We're a nation of believers," the president said. "Faith is deeply embedded into the history of our country, the spirit of our founding and the soul of our nation."

The order first and foremost establishes officially the Trump administration's policy to "vigorously enforce federal law's robust protections for religious freedom." It also states that the Founding Fathers "envisioned a nation in which religious voices and views were integral to a vibrant public square, and in which religious people and institutions were free to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or retaliation by the federal government."

"For that reason, the United States Constitution enshrines and protects the fundamental right to religious liberty as Americans' first freedom," the order states. "Federal law protects the freedom of Americans and their organizations to exercise religion and participate fully in civic life without undue interference by the federal government. The executive branch will honor and enforce those protections."

The order also directs all executive branch departments of the federal government to "respect and protect the freedom of persons and organizations to engage in religious and political speech." It specifically directs Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin to ensure the IRS curtail efforts "against any individual, house of worship or other religious organization

on the basis that such individual or organization speaks or has spoken about moral or political issues from a religious perspective, where speech of similar character has, consistent with law, not ordinarily been treated as participation or intervention in a political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) a candidate for public office.”

That provision effectively disarms the IRS from enforcing the so-called “Johnson Amendment.” But the order doesn’t stop there. It also directs Mnuchin, Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta and Secretary of Health & Human Services Dr. Tom Price to consider issuing amended regulations to address conscience-based objections to the preventive-care mandates of federal law.

It also directs Attorney General Jeff Sessions to issue guidance interpreting religious liberty protections in federal law.

Among those taking part in the Rose Garden ceremony was Skyline Church pastor Dr. Jim Garlow. He responded to the historic event exclusively to Charisma Caucus:

“This was an enormous step forward today in religious liberty First Amendment Constitutional rights being returned to the American people in the way our Founding Fathers envisioned, before it was ripped away in recent years. I’m so grateful I had the opportunity to be at the Rose Garden at the White House for such an important occasion. Admittedly this is only a first step. There are more steps needed, but this is a great first step.

“Thank God for President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence who respect the American people and understand the U.S. Constitution provisions for religious liberties. Most significant was when the president acknowledged that these rights and freedoms do not come from government, but they come from God. Finally, a president who understands this truth.”

Other evangelical faith leaders have responded, as well:

- **Family Research Council President Tony Perkins**—"The president's executive order is a clear reflection of his campaign promise to protect the religious freedoms of Americans. President Trump is taking a significant first step to defending religious liberty. In working with the Trump administration, it is clear that they both recognize and understand the dangers of the anti-faith policies of the previous administration and are therefore committed to undoing those policies and restoring true religious freedom. The freedom to live out faith in all areas of society without government punishment or intimidation is what has made America great.

"Finally, the federal government realizes the immoral and insane mandate that forces organizations like the Little Sisters of the Poor to include contraception and abortifacients in their health care plans. No longer will the IRS muzzle the speech of pastors and non-profit organizations and the Department of Justice will address the host of other anti-religious policies and actions launched by the previous administration by issuing guidelines for all federal agencies. The guidelines will ensure religious beliefs and actions are respected and protected.

"This step today starts the process of reversing the devastating trend set by the last administration to punish charities, pastors, family-owned businesses and honest, hard-working people simply for living according to their faith. This trend is in part why 60 percent of Trump voters in the last election said they were more likely to vote for him because the GOP platform is very clear on religious liberty and unborn life.

"The open season on Christians and other people of faith is coming to a close in America and we look forward to

assisting the Trump administration in fully restoring America's First Freedom."

- **Dr. James Dobson**—"I have been privileged to serve five presidents. I've witnessed the ebb and flow of politics in this country for a half century, and I prayed with great anxiety about the future as I watched President Obama move this nation in a direction that defied the Constitution, especially as it relates to Religious Liberty. In all these years, I've never found myself more optimistic about the preservation of our Judeo-Christian values as I am today.

"Today's action must be the first among others because the efforts by previous administrations to marginalize conservative communities of faith were real, thorough and complex. Yet, the combined effect of today's executive order, legislative actions, and prayer service on the White House lawn are unprecedented. This President and Vice President will go down in history as defenders of religious liberty, and I commend them for it."

- **First Liberty Institute President and CEO Kelly Shackelford**—"President Trump's executive order on religious liberty should be both unnecessary and unremarkable. Yet activists have pledged to challenge President Trump in court for supporting the First Amendment. Our country was founded on the promise that its government would respect the religious liberty of its people. First Liberty will do everything in our power to support this effort for America's first liberty—religious freedom."
- **Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver**—"We commend President Trump for sending a message to Congress and the rest of America that religious freedom must be protected. This is an appropriate way to commemorate the National Day of Prayer as our President

commits to protect and promote religious freedom.”

The president also used the opportunity to sign his annual National Day of Prayer proclamation, which offered a powerful defense of America’s Christian foundation. The following is the complete text of that proclamation:

We come together on our National Day of Prayer as one nation, under God, to show gratitude for our many blessings, to give thanks for His providence and to ask for His continued wisdom, strength and protection as we chart a course for the future. We are united in prayer, each according to our own faith and tradition, and we believe that in America, people of all faiths, creeds and religions must be free to exercise their natural right to worship according to their consciences.

We are also reminded and reaffirm that all human beings have the right, not only to pray and worship according to their consciences, but to practice their faith in their homes, schools, charities and businesses, in private and in the public square, free from government coercion, discrimination or persecution. Religion is not merely an intellectual exercise, but also a practical one that demands action in the world. Even the many prisoners around the world who are persecuted for their faith can pray privately in their cells. But our Constitution demands more: the freedom to practice one’s faith publicly.

The religious liberty guaranteed by the Constitution is not a favor from the government but a natural right bestowed by God. Our Constitution and our laws that protect religious freedom merely recognize the right that all people have by virtue of their humanity. As Thomas Jefferson wisely questioned: “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”

In 1789, President George Washington proclaimed a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, calling upon Americans to “unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations.” In 1988, the Congress, by Public Law 100-307, called on the president to issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a “National Day of Prayer.” On this National Day of Prayer, the right to pray freely and live according to one’s faith is under threat around the world from coercive governments and terrorist organizations. We therefore pray especially for the many people around the world who are persecuted for their beliefs and deprived of their fundamental liberty to live according to their conscience. We pray for the triumph of freedom over oppression, and for God’s love and mercy over evil.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, president of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 4, 2017, as a National Day of Prayer. I invite the citizens of our nation to pray, in accordance with their own faiths and consciences, in thanksgiving for the freedoms and blessings we have received and for God’s guidance and continued protection as we meet the challenges before us.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand seventeen, and of the independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-first.

Watch the entire ceremony in the video clip above. {eoa}