

Ted Cruz Comments Spark Concern and Outrage

Christians using Twitter on Wednesday and Thursday were expressing their concern and outrage over comments from an unexpected source.

Former presidential candidate U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), who campaigned on a platform that included an emphasis on religious freedom for American Christians, drew their consternation over comments he made about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday. Modi spoke before a joint session of Congress at the invitation of Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.).

Repeatedly throughout his speech, Modi discussed how "freedom of faith" and "equality of all citizens" are "enshrined as fundamental rights" in his country. But the facts tell an entirely different story:

Beginning in the late-1990s, during its first rise to power in India, Modi's political party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, violence against religious minorities—especially Christians—has soared. And while Modi himself has publicly renounced the violence and pledged to punish those responsible, humanitarian organizations in the country say little is being done, and in many instances, the BJP has facilitated the persecution.

So many Christians were shocked when Cruz made the following tweet after Modi's speech:

Proud to welcome PM Narendra Modi to Congress today. #India lights the way for its neighbors toward a better future.

The tweet included a link to an official statement from the senator.

“It is a pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the U.S. Congress today, and I welcome this opportunity to bring our two democracies even closer,” he said. “As the Indian economy continues to liberalize and grow, it lights the way for its neighbors toward a better future for the Asia-Pacific region. India’s status as a rising power will only grow stronger as it continues to pursue political reform and economic liberalization.

“America welcomes this development, as does Texas, which is home to hundreds of thousands of Indian-Americans and hosts a remarkable range of Indian companies and investors. I look forward to strengthening our strategic economic and security relationships in the years to come.”

Some of the users who reacted wondered at first if Cruz was joking, or perhaps being sarcastic. But in light of previous comments he has made about Modi, including a congratulatory statement following the prime minister’s election last year, they joined the chorus of those demanding the senator use his bully pulpit to push for improvements in religious freedom.

Modi’s official Twitter account responded by thanking Cruz on Thursday afternoon.