

Wash. Florist Barronelle Stutzman's Case Stems From Intolerance—But Not Hers

Barronelle Stutzman may be a small-town florist, but she's planting plenty of national doubts about religious liberty. While liberal designers are celebrated for refusing to dress the First Lady, Christians continue to be hauled to court for asking for those same rights.

Recently, that hypocrisy was on full display in the Washington State Supreme Court, which ruled that the state should be able to rob you of your home, life savings, and anything else of value just because you hold a different political view than the people in power. In a unanimous decision, the justices found the grandmother and 40-year veteran of the floral industry guilty of discrimination for daring to do what the First Amendment protects: living out her faith at work.

Washington state didn't care that, as the owner of Arlene's Flowers, Barronelle had served homosexuals—or even employed them. The court and state attorney general believe Stutzman should be forced to celebrate their values, even if doing so offends her religious beliefs. When long-time customer Robert Ingersoll stopped by the shop to make arrangements for his upcoming same-sex wedding, Barronelle had politely declined. Although she'd happily sold arrangements to the man for a decade, she explained that she objected to participating in a ceremony that violates her faith.

Since I never hid my faith, I always figured Rob understood that my beliefs shape not only how I look at the world, but how I envision and create my art—the art he appreciated for so long. So it wasn't that I wouldn't create something to celebrate his same-sex wedding—I couldn't. This wasn't about

selling him flowers, or celebrating a birthday. This involved what, to me, is an event of unique spiritual significance—a sacred covenant. Art, like faith, comes from the heart, from who I am. I couldn't deny my faith—even for so dear a friend—without damaging the very creativity he was asking for.

Robert said he respected her opinion; the two hugged and parted ways. To Stutzman's surprise, they were reunited by an interesting source: the Washington State Attorney General, who filed a rare, private-citizen lawsuit against Barronelle. "I was never offered a settlement," Stutzman explained. "I was offered an ultimatum: 'Either you will do as I tell you to do; you will think the way I think; you will perform the way I think you should perform and create. And if you don't, I'm going to destroy you.'"

After this morning's decision, the fixture of the Richland community was stunned. "I'm not asking for anything that our Constitution hasn't promised me and every other American: the right to create freely, and to live out my faith without fear of government punishment or interference." Americans like Barronelle were told repeatedly that redefining marriage wouldn't impact their lives. Now, two years into this social experiment forced on the country by the courts, families are being driven from their businesses—and today, their homes—for wanting the same tolerance the left preaches. Barronelle's attorney, Alliance Defending Freedom's (ADF) Kristen Waggoner, was blown away by the injustice.

"In a free America, people with differing beliefs must have room to coexist," she said. "Our nation has a long history of protecting the right to dissent, but simply because Barronelle disagrees with the state about marriage, the government and ACLU have put at risk everything she owns... It's no wonder that so many people are rightly calling on President Trump to sign an executive order to protect our religious freedom to

prevent the federal government from persecuting Christians the way rogue state actors in states like Washington are doing. Because that freedom is clearly at risk for Barronelle and so many other Americans, and because no executive order can fix all of the threats to that freedom, we will ask the U.S. Supreme Court to hear this case and reverse this grave injustice.”

ADF hopes, as we do, that the U.S. Supreme Court will see what its Washington counterpart did not: that the real victims of discrimination are Christians with sincerely-held beliefs. Americans of all backgrounds have suffered the loss of their religious liberties because of Obama-era policies. The time to protect our First Freedom is now. {eoa}