

Washington's Topsy-Turvy Rhetoric Escalates the War on Faith

A favorite tactic of this administration is to engage in outrageous behavior and then—with the support of its allies—put its opponents on the defensive by accusing them of engaging in the conduct of which it is, in fact, guilty.

So, for example, the administration takes far-out positions on social issues—then labels as extreme anyone who stands up for mainstream values. The White House promotes monetary policies that destroy jobs—and then attacks the business community for driving income inequality.

The latest example of this jujitsu maneuver involves the Health and Human Services contraceptive mandate under the Affordable Care Act. The mandate tramples on the religious freedom of religiously affiliated organizations like the Little Sisters of the Poor and model employers like Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood by attempting to force them, under the threat of crippling IRS fines, to participate in the provision of potentially life-terminating drugs that violate their deeply held religious beliefs.

Yet several opinion pieces over recent weeks (most notably a jeremiad by Harvard Law professor Noah Feldman) have—incredibly—charged these entities with discriminating against workers on religious grounds based on the legal challenges of the regulation.

Feldman provides absolutely no basis in fact or argument for his bald statement that companies, in particular, are “religious discriminators.” That’s because there is none.

The absurdity of the discrimination accusation is evident. The

Little Sisters devote their lives to provide nursing, assisted living and hospice services to the low-income elderly, accepting all comers with no hint of prejudice. As one of them puts it, the order cares “for the neediest elderly of all faiths and cultures. Not because they are Catholic, but because we are.”

The owners of Hobby Lobby, David and Barbara Green, their children and their grandchildren, are committed—in writing and in their actions—to living out their faith in all aspects of their family business. That commitment includes generous treatment of their nearly 28,000 employees.

The Greens offer pay far above the minimum wage as well as a free health care clinic to employees on their main campus in Oklahoma City, Okla. Hobby Lobby stores also keep shorter hours than most retailers and are closed on Sundays so that employees can have a better work-life balance and more time with their families.

Moreover, of the 20 FDA-approved contraceptives that are part of the mandate, the Greens only object to four with the potential to terminate life—they willingly provide the other 16 as part of a robust health care plan, and employees are free to purchase any drugs or devices they choose to on their own.

If that’s discrimination, it’s the kind millions of lonely and destitute older Americans and unemployed or underpaid workers would love to be subjected to. But those of us who have dealt with true bias know that it is nothing of the sort.

Rather, this harsh rhetoric is part of an escalation of the war on faith waged by this administration. The White House is unleashing not only the full force of government but also an all-out intimidation campaign to drive the free exercise of faith from everyday life and the marketplace of ideas and into the confines of churches, mosques and synagogues for one day a

week.

This attack campaign has included one of the highest officials in the White House going to the blogosphere to call out Hobby Lobby by name for daring, as a for-profit corporation, to assert its First Amendment rights.

The reason? The Washington ruling class understands that the exercise of religion as a living, breathing, 24/7 reality—as opposed to once-a-week worship—is perhaps the most significant threat to the expansion of government and its spreading control over our lives. Government’s intimidation of competing institutions therefore necessitates an assault on their values as well.

Hobby Lobby and the Little Sisters, both represented by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, have recently won important skirmishes in this ongoing war. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the company’s case (along with Conestoga Wood), and it also granted the Little Sisters protection against the crushing IRS-imposed fines with the grant of an injunction.

But these victories are far from final. The administration has made it clear that it will use every means at its disposal to prevail over the long haul—including bullying nuns and believing family business owners, both deploying the levers of power housed in the Department of Justice and via its prodigious megaphone.

To preserve our first freedom, people of faith of all stripes must demonstrate their determination to go to the same lengths. And that starts with blowing the whistle on the topsy-turvy rhetoric in Washington.

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