

You Won't Believe How Many Christian Business Owners Are Under LGBT Fire

Hysteria over Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act has drowned out one critical question: Who are the florist and baker that ABC's George Stephanopoulos hounded Gov. Mike Pence about?

When Americans learn what that florist and baker are threatened with, we face an emerging trend that will destroy companies and jobs, and the chilling specter of what sort of a nation we are becoming.

The florist is 70-year-old grandmother Baronelle Stutzman of Washington state. A longtime gay customer—with whom she had a warm relationship—wanted her to do flower arrangements for his gay wedding.

Mrs. Stutzman, a Southern Baptist, explained her Christian belief that marriage is between a man and woman, and thus could not participate in a gay wedding. Washington's attorney general prosecuted her, pursuing not only her business but also Mrs. Stutzman personally. A state judge has ruled against her, and she faces the loss of her life's savings and even her home.

The baker is Jack Phillips, who owns Masterpiece Cakeshop in Colorado. When he declined two gay men's order to bake a cake celebrating gay marriage (though the men were welcome to buy any of the premade cakes off the shelf), they officially complained that Mr. Phillips violated Colorado's civil-rights law.

A court ruled against him, ordering him and his employees to undergo government-approved "tolerance training," and also

ordering him to bake cakes celebrating gay marriage for anyone who asks. If he refuses, he can go to jail—put behind bars—for contempt of court.

There are others. First was a New Mexico photographer who did not want to do the wedding shoot for a gay-commitment ceremony—not a wedding—because New Mexico had neither gay marriage nor civil unions at the time.

A Kentucky T-shirt maker is being sued for not making shirts celebrating a gay-rights event. An Idaho pastor couple was pursued for not actually performing a gay wedding. The list goes on, and grows monthly.

Secularists on the left have vehemently opposed all religious freedom acts (RFRAs) since at least the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby case in 2014. The justices held that Hobby Lobby—a corporation owned by a devout Christian family—could assert religious-liberty rights as an extension of its Christian owners.

It found ObamaCare's regulation requiring Hobby Lobby to provide abortion-related health care violated the federal RFRA, because the rule substantially burdened the family's religious beliefs and wasn't the least-restrictive means to achieve a compelling public interest.

In 1993, the federal RFRA unanimously passed the U.S. House, passed the Senate 97-3, and was signed by President Bill Clinton, a vocal supporter of both abortion and the gay-rights agenda.

Millions of Americans are employed by businesses owned by people of faith—Christian or otherwise. Without RFRA protections, employees of Hobby Lobby, Arlene Flowers, Masterpiece Cakeshop and religious non-church entities, such as the University of Notre Dame, would lose their jobs. Therefore, protecting religious liberty also protects jobs. Republicans must reject the false choice that this issue is

business vs. the Christian Right; those framing the issue as such seek to drive a wedge in the GOP to defeat Republicans in 2016.

These recent lawsuits are why Indiana's RFRA specified that businesses like Hobby Lobby can assert the RFRA in court. And lawsuits initiated by the plaintiffs in Washington and Colorado are why the law specified that the RFRA can apply between private parties.

It's baffling why Indiana legislators were unprepared to explain these things to the nation. Nor can we understand why they chose to sign a "fix" creating unprecedented ways for opponents to sue people of faith in Indiana for declining to participate in gay marriages and abortions. Christians in Indiana might have been better off if legislators repealed the RFRA, reverting Indiana's laws to their previous condition.

If anything, Republican leaders could have demanded a replacement bill identical to the federal RFRA. They should have said: "If it was good enough for Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer to sponsor and for Bill Clinton to sign, then it's good enough for Hoosiers today."

Opponents would have condemned it, but in doing so confirmed that the modern secular left condemns all religious freedoms that impede their agenda, and that the RFRA truly has nothing to do with hate or discrimination.

It is astounding that a nation settled by people who crossed an ocean to live in a wilderness according to their religious beliefs and conscience is now poised to oppress millions who desire simply to live by those same beliefs. Everyone has the right to run a business consistent with their beliefs, employing other Americans in the process. Republicans must take up that theme as a pro-business stance.

RFRA supporters are like the brave Americans in the Deep South decades ago who stood for black civil rights against intense

political pressure. The fanatical authoritarianism of the political left is plunging this country headlong into a very dark place from which many nations never return.

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