

It's Open Season on People of Faith in Georgia

Georgia's Republican governor stunned the state's religious community Monday by vetoing legislation that would have protected preachers who refuse to perform LGBT marriages.

"It's open season on people of faith in our state," said State Sen. Josh McKoon, the author of the 2014 Religious Freedom Restoration Act. "It's a slap in the face to conservatives, to evangelicals and to the broader faith community," he told me.

Gov. Nathan Deal vetoed the bill under tremendous pressure from major corporations who threatened to take their business out of the state should he side with Georgia's religious community.

"Our actions on HB 757 are not just about protecting the faith-based community or providing a business-friendly climate for job growth in Georgia," he said. "This is about the character of our state and the character of its people."

Deal took religious leaders to task for questioning his moral convictions and his personal character. Nor did he take kindly to business leaders who threatened to leave Georgia.

"I do not respond well to insults or threats," he said.

Simply put – the bill would have protected pastors from having to perform same-sex marriages. Faith-based organizations, like Christian schools, would also have been extended protection from renting its facilities to any organization that was contrary to its beliefs.

However, gay rights groups alleged the legislation would have essentially legalized discrimination.

"Discrimination and intolerance have no place in the

21st century, and any town, city or state that enshrines it into law will not be judged kindly by history or by the American public,” Human Rights Campaign President Chad Griffin said in a prepared statement.

He called the legislation a “deplorable attack on the fundamental civil rights of LGBT people.”

Sen. McKoon told me the governor’s decision is “very chilling.”

“The message being sent is we are not going to even extend protection to the houses of worship, to religious schools,” he said. “It’s very, very disturbing and disappointing that the governor would veto the bill.”

It was even more disappointing because this was a watered-down version of the original legislation.

“The governor’s office has been all over the place on this issue – from week to week, from day to day,” McKoon said.

But it became clear Gov. Deal was more interested in protecting the Almighty Dollar than he was protecting followers of the Almighty.

Big-name businesses like Coca-Cola, Netflix, Apple, Time Warner and Marriott demanded the governor side with the LGBT community instead of Christians.

The National Football League strongly suggested that Atlanta’s Super Bowl bid might be jeopardized.

Think Progress reported that Marvel Studios and the Walt Disney Co. threatened to “take their business elsewhere” should the legislation become law.

Religious groups mounted fierce support for the bill – with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board and the Faith & Freedom Coalition leading the charge.

"The governor's veto subverts the will of the people of Georgia," said Timothy Head, executive director of the Faith & Freedom Coalition.

Robert White, the executive director of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, said the governor chose to ignore millions of Christians in the state.

"The governor and others have knuckled under to the threats of big business and the LGBT lobby group," he told me.

White said he believes ministers will still be protected under federal law – but he felt like state legislation was needed for additional protection.

"This puts us in a more precarious position," he said. "There's no doubt about it."

Gov. Deal's veto was an act of political cowardice and political expedience. He betrayed the good Christian people of Georgia and demonstrated once again why voters are so frustrated with the Republican Party.

Instead of bending over for big business, the governor should've given Disney and all those other anti-Christian corporate bullies the heave-ho.

As we say in the South – don't let the door hit ya where the Good Lord done split ya.