

Religious Liberty Bill Goes Down in Defeat as Republicans Side With LGBT Activists

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal issued an Executive Order late Tuesday to protect religious liberty and prevent the state from discriminating against those with deeply held religious beliefs.

“In Louisiana, the state should not be able to take adverse action against a person for their belief in traditional marriage,” Jindal said. “That’s why I’m issuing an Executive Order to prevent the state from discriminating against people, charities and family-owned businesses with deeply held religious beliefs that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Earlier story:

Louisiana Republican lawmakers sided with Democrats, big business and LGBT activists to kill a bill that would have protected individuals and religious institutions opposed to same-sex marriage.

In doing so, lawmakers defied the objections of an overwhelmingly majority of voters and handed Gov. Bobby Jindal a significant defeat for his legislative agenda.

A house legal committee voted 10-2 on Tuesday to shelve the Louisiana Marriage and Conscience Act—a measure that critics said could sanction discrimination against same-sex couples.

However, the proposed law clearly stated its sole purpose was to prevent the government from discriminating against a person or a nonprofit because of their support for traditional marriage.

"These ten legislators voted today against freedom and against two-thirds of Louisianans who support the Marriage and Conscience Act," said Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council and a supporter of the bill. "This is a failure of leadership and goes to the heart of what's wrong with American politics today."

Perkins was referring to a WPA poll commissioned by the Louisiana Family Forum and FRC that indicated 67 percent of likely voters supported the bill. Even more shocking—63 percent of Democrats supported the bill.

"These elected leaders effectively endorsed government discrimination against individuals and nonprofits simply for believing in marriage between a man and a woman," Perkins said. "No person or nonprofit should lose tax exempt status, face disqualification, lose a professional license or be punished by the government simply for believing what President Obama believed just three years ago—that marriage is the union of a man and a woman."

Among those strong-arming the bill was IBM—which is building a technology jobs center in Baton Rouge. An IBM executive penned a letter to *The Times-Picayune* warning that "IBM will find it much harder to attract talent to Louisiana if this bill is passed and enacted into law."

Gov. Jindal scoffed at such threats in an April 23 op-ed published by *The New York Times*.

"I have a clear message for any corporation that contemplates bullying our state: Save your breath," he wrote.

He said he would not be deterred by corporations that were pressured by radical liberals.

"As a nation we would not compel a priest, minister or rabbi to violate his conscience and perform a same-sex wedding ceremony," Jindal wrote. "But a great many Americans who are

not members of the clergy feel just as called to live their faith through their businesses. That's why we should ensure that musicians, caterers, photographers and others should be immune from government coercion on deeply held religious convictions."

Equality Louisiana accused Johnson of trying to bring discrimination to the state through the back door. They partnered with Louisiana Progress Action and other groups to oppose the bill.

"I remain convinced that the bill is bad for Louisiana—bad for our state's economy and bad for our state's people," Equality Louisiana's Matthew Patterson said in a statement.

State Rep. Mike Johnson authored the bill. The Republican, from Bossier City, took a beating not only from the Left—but also from fellow Republicans.

A Republican city councilman in Baton Rouge called him a "despicable bigot of the highest order."

"It's shameful," Johnson told me. "He never met me before he said that. He never read the legislation. People will say what they say—I can't control that."

However, it appears that Republican lawmakers bought into the lies and distortions propagated by activists and big business.

"This bill is a simple measure to protect religious freedom," Johnson said. "A few well-funded activist groups have intentionally mischaracterized the bill—spreading fear and intimidation and misinformation."

Johnson said he was not at all surprised by the survey that found even Louisiana Democrats supported his doomed measure.

"The people of Louisiana are at their heart very patriotic, very conservative—even in the Democrat party," he said. "They understand that religious liberty ought to be protected."

Johnson said he has seen the future of religious liberty in America—and it is grim.

He foresees a day when Christian churches could lose their tax-exempt status and Christian schools could lose their accreditation. He foresees a day when those who refuse to endorse same-sex marriage could be prohibited from practicing their profession.

That's why he pushed the legislation.

"If society's views on marriage are going to change—if the Supreme Court declares there is a right to same-sex marriage—we have to do all we can to ensure that religious liberty is not a casualty of that new and emerging idea," he said.

Todd Starnes *is host of "Fox News & Commentary," heard on hundreds of radio stations. Sign up for his American Dispatch newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.*