

What Republican Presidential Contenders Say About Indiana Religious Freedom Law

Possible contenders for the U.S. Republican presidential nomination are speaking out in support of Indiana's new 'religious freedom' law, addressing controversy over the legislation with conservative views of faith and liberty.

"This is simply allowing people of faith space to be able to express their beliefs, to be able to be people of conscience. I think once the facts are established people aren't going to see this as discriminatory at all," said Jeb Bush, a former Florida governor who is expected to announce a presidential bid, in a radio interview on Monday.

Indiana Governor Mike Pence, also a Republican, last week signed into law the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to keep the state government from forcing business owners to act against their religious beliefs. Democrats and others have criticized the law as discriminatory, saying it allows businesses to refuse service to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

On Tuesday Pence called for amending the law to prohibit discrimination.

Senator Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican who recently entered the presidential contest, said the law fends off "a concerted assault" on the freedoms of both speech and religion.

"Indiana is giving voice to millions of courageous conservatives across this country who are deeply concerned about the ongoing attacks upon our personal liberties," he said in a statement released late Monday.

Marco Rubio, a U.S. senator from Florida who is widely expected to enter the Republican race, cast the law as a shield against religious discrimination.

“No one here is saying that it should be legal to deny someone service at a restaurant or at a hotel because of their sexual orientation,” he said on Fox News on Monday. “The flip side of it is, though, should a photographer be punished for refusing to do a wedding that their faith teaches them ... is not valid in the eyes of God?”

One of the most talked-about potential Republican nominees, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, did not address the law directly. In a statement his press secretary said he “believes in broad religious freedom and the right for Americans to exercise their religion and act on their conscience.”

The favorite for the Democratic nomination, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a tweet last week, said: “Sad this new Indiana law can happen in America today. We shouldn’t discriminate against people because of who they love.”

Clinton has not announced her intention to run.

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