

Pastor Protection Act A Victory for Florida and America

With the onslaught of opposition to all things Christian in our culture, it's easy to get discouraged. But something good happened last week to help stem the tide.

In my home state of Florida, Gov. Rick Scott signed the Pastor Protection Act into law which protects clergy, churches and religious organizations and their employees from civil action for refusing to perform same-sex marriages. This comes months after the U.S. Supreme Court issued its *Obergefell v. Hodges* opinion last summer.

We reported this on our site when it happened, mentioning that Rep. Scott Plakon was the sponsor of the bill. What we didn't tell was the behind the scenes story about the bill and how it came about. It's a story of how a principled Christian can have an impact on public policy.

I know this story well because Plakon and I have been close friends for more than 25 years. When he decided to run for office in 2007, I did everything I could to help get him elected. I knew we needed lawmakers with his conservative values.

Since then, Plakon has made a name for himself as one of the most principled and effective lawmakers in our legislature. The local liberal newspaper called him the most conservative representative in Tallahassee, and they didn't mean it as a compliment. But, that's the way he took it!

When I interviewed him for this Strang Report, we recorded it as a podcast (if you don't listen to my Strang Report, I urge you to do so now.) You can hear him tell the story in his own

words.

In spite of the fact that marriage has been between one man and one woman for millennia in every culture on earth, the gay community has pushed an agenda to have homosexuality become accepted as normal, partly by pushing the concept of same-sex marriage, which by a 5-4 decision of the Supreme Court is now legal in every state.

The so-called LGBT community has singled out people who don't agree with them—especially bakers, photographers and wedding planners—with lawsuits against these business people if they don't approve of gay marriage and don't agree to do business with them. Some highly publicized cases have meant financial ruin for people who felt they were condoning gay marriage if they participated in any way.

Plakon was concerned that ministers and churches would be targeted next. He was aware that Texas had passed a similar law with overwhelming majorities. He modeled his page and a half law after Texas. While the law passed both the House and Senate in Florida by about a 2-1 vote, the opposition was tremendous, he told me. On one hand, the gay community said the law wasn't necessary because the constitutional protection of religious freedom in the first amendment meant this wouldn't happen.

But, with the speed of the social change that has taken place in recent years, and the fact no one really knows where this would go, there needed to be an extra layer of protection, Plakon said. On the other hand—during the hearings that took place and in the debate in the legislature—some opponents took the opportunity to call Plakon and his supporters every sort of vile name.

Here is a link if you want to watch some of the hearings. The debate on the Pastor Protection Act begins at the 1: mark of the video.

Plakon said several hundred pastors rallied to his side, often making multiple trips to Tallahassee to testify and lobby in support of the bill. To him, that's a hopeful sign.

One of those who testified was my friend and neighbor Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, who recently spoke at a rally in Tallahassee advocating for the bill.

"I am pleased that the Pastor Protection Act is now law in Florida," he said in a news story we published. "However, more protections are needed beyond just pastors and churches performing weddings. We should pass broad legislation that protects the religious freedom and conscience of all people who refuse to be conscripted into service of the so-called LGBT agenda.

"This assault on marriage is really an attempt to obliterate Judeo-Christian morality, to destroy marriage and family, and is an attack on God, who created male and female."

I asked Rep. Plakon what the average Christian could do. He said they should be aware of what's happening with public policy. They can testify at hearings when legislation is being considered, on this and other topics. He also said more can run for office and be part of the policy making process.

He said Christians must get involved or be faced with losing constitutional liberties such as free speech and the ability to freely exercise our faith in the public square.

Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) was a prominent Protestant pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. He famously made this quote which should make all of us think and willing to stand up, as he did:

*"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.*

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Do you agree with this sentiment? Do you admire Rep. Scott Plakon and his work as I do? Then put this on social media to get out the word to encourage other Christ followers to get involved and to speak up for our religious freedoms. Remember to listen to the podcast (and to subscribe!)