

April 22, 2015

Thank you for the response to my letter to the editor that was in the Columbus Dispatch. I do respect your point of view even though I disagree with it and your conclusions. If I may, I would like to address some of the points you made.

I don't believe that LGBT people are targeting Christian businesses. There is not some conspiracy to attack religion either. The tradition of this country, when it comes to rights, is like the old adage "*Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man's nose begins.*" That means that your freedom to practice your religion can't unduly hinder the rights of other people who may or may not be part of your group.

Even if a business, open to the public, identifies as Christian, it can't deny service to a protected group under the Civil Rights law. I'm sure you would be upset if you were a Christian and were refused service by a business that identified itself as Muslim owned.

The ironic thing is that sexual orientation isn't a protected class under federal law for public accommodations. State laws like the Indiana Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) isn't restoring anything since the ability to discriminate against LGBTs is not illegal under the law in many states. Indiana doesn't have a state non-discrimination law for public accommodations. Only 20 states have such protections for LGBTs.

I, and the seculars I represent, believe that sexual orientation and gender identity should be a protected class. The storm over Indiana's RFRA is exactly why such protection from discrimination is needed.

We believe that businesses who discriminate against LGBT people should be called out for their discrimination just as they should face public scrutiny if it was learned they had cheated customers. If you have a business open to the public, how you operate your business should be open too.

You are lucky to be in a large urban area like Greater Columbus where there are many places to do business, however not everyone lives in a city. What if you were the only cake baker in town? Why should your religious beliefs force a burden on a couple by making them travel to another town or nearest city to get service?

I could also ask you, if you don't want to serve same sex couples then why don't you close your business or take it private? That's an option.

You asked why people didn't complain about the federal RFRA passed in 1993. The Secular Coalition for Ohio didn't exist but personally, at the time, I had issues with the law. I knew then it would be a matter of time before it was expanded to be used to give **special privileges** for the religious. I was right. It went from only covering Native American peyote smoking to being used to support giving corporations religious rights through the *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* US Supreme Court decision.

SCO and other 1st amendment groups do want to see the federal RFRA repealed and some groups had called for it to be repealed years before the *Hobby Lobby* court case.

You mentioned in your letter that marriage is between one man and one woman in order to “continue the species”. Your conclusion is not quite true. Marriage began as a way for men to mark their property (property included their wife and children) and has evolved to be a legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them. Not to mention the fact that one doesn't need to be married to have children.

Do you believe that infertile couples or couples who decide not to have children should not be allowed to marry or be refused service?

Your religious version of marriage should not infringe on civil marriage laws. Like I said in my letter, the clergy will not be forced to perform same-sex marriages and churches are exempt from public accommodation laws. RFRA's aren't needed to restore anything.

I think that human rights and basic dignity of all people is just as important as the national debt. I don't think one has to deal with only one issue at the exclusion of all others. We can multi-task.

I agree that our representatives are doing nothing on important issues because they are busy pandering to religious conservatives like yourself by passing laws to deny same-sex couples rights and benefits heterosexual couples get through marriage, trying to nickel and dime Roe v Wade with more radical restrictions on a woman's right to choose and giving businesses religious rights they shouldn't have.

The Secular Coalition for Ohio is working to remove religious infringement on our civil rights.

Thank you again for your letter and take care,

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co-chair Secular Coalition for Ohio

<http://oh.secular.org>