

Conservative Action Project

The Conservative Action Project, founded by former **Attorney General Edwin Meese** and chaired by **The Honorable Becky Norton Dunlop**, is designed to facilitate conservative leaders working together on behalf of common goals. Participants include the CEO's of over 100 organizations representing all major elements of the conservative movement-economic, social and national security.

Memo to the Movement

Religious Liberty

July 10, 2015
Washington, DC

We must act now to protect religious liberty in America.

On June 26, the U.S. Supreme Court stripped more than 50 million Americans of their votes upholding marriage as it has been defined for millennia by diverse cultures, and faiths across the globe.

Marriage has long been a positive way for a man and a woman to share long-lasting commitment to each other and their children. Making marriage no different than any other adult relationship makes the marriage commitment less meaningful and easier to disregard.

But the impact of redefining marriage for the entire nation will reach far beyond the institutions of marriage and family. The court's ruling fundamentally transforms the relationship between the American people and those in power. Justice Alito noted this reality in his dissent: "Most Americans—understandably—will cheer or lament today's decision because of their views on the issue of same-sex marriage. But all Americans, whatever their thinking on that issue, should worry about what the majority's claim of power portends."

The Court's abuse of power is of such historic proportions that the conservative movement, and indeed every American who cherishes liberty must now address the serious damage done to the cause of freedom and the very foundation of our civil society.

The loss of freedom due to the redefinition of marriage has already been seen in states across the country. State governments have unfairly punished and discriminated against Americans from all walks of life simply for living according to their beliefs in support of man-woman marriage.

Small business owners have been fined for following this belief. Last week, an Oregon Labor Commissioner ordered Aaron and Melissa Klein to pay a fine of \$ 135,000 for declining to bake a same-sex wedding cake. The commissioner also imposed a gag order on the Kleins, ordering them to "cease and desist" discussing their case publicly. The order demonstrates that this assault on our most essential freedoms will not stop with the free exercise of our religion; it endangers the freedom of speech as well. States have even shut down longstanding adoption and foster care providers for not sharing the government's view of marriage. These are only a few examples. By inventing a constitutional "right" to same-sex "marriage," the Court has opened the door wide to more severe forms of discrimination against those who believe in natural marriage. The dissenting justices explain very clearly what we must now prepare for: a majority opinion that "will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent."

We commit ourselves to the work of ensuring that the government never penalizes or discriminates against anyone simply for believing what President Obama believed about marriage just three years ago.

The Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, association, and religion for every American, but those freedoms will now collide with a Supreme Court ruling that places demands on Americans who continue to abide by the truth of marriage as the union of man and woman.

We call on Congress to pass the First Amendment Defense Act and for state legislatures to approve similar measures that stop the government from discriminating against those who believe in natural marriage. No individual should lose their tax exempt status, face disqualification, be fined, or lose grants or contracts for following their beliefs. A failure to enact these commonsense protections will only deepen the divide in our country which according to the latest polls is nearly evenly split on the marriage ruling. Penalizing those charities and organizations that believe in natural marriage could threaten and harm their ability to help millions of people. The time for action is now because when government forces Americans to violate their deeply-held beliefs, government itself threatens every fundamental freedom.

We stand united for the freedom to live according to one's beliefs about marriage. And we will continue to speak courageously, and compassionately about the unchanging truth of marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

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