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# Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Friday, September 25, 2015

SEPTEMBER 28TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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**8th Congressional District - Missouri** - History was made this week when Pope Francis addressed a joint session of Congress and was the first Pontiff ever to do so. Some of the most poignant remarks from Pope Francis focused on the importance of religious liberty. His observations come during a time when the religious rights of millions across the world and here in America are being trampled.

For centuries the United States of America has led the way on tolerance and religious freedom. More than 350 years ago, the first religious liberty law was established when Maryland was just a colony. In 1791, freedom of religion officially became part of the Bill of Rights. As the pope said in his address, “It is important today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard.”

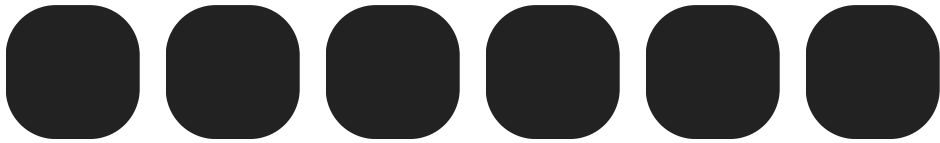
Today though, our government has become intolerant of religion in any form. Right here in Missouri’s Eighth Congressional District, I had to stand up to the National Park Service when it began requiring a permit and a 48-hour notice before baptisms could occur within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. These conditions were not required for fishing or boating. Under Obamacare, employers are forced to provide health insurances that cover services and medications that violate their religious beliefs. Additionally, Christian business owners across the country are being fined and hauled to court for choosing not to use their artistic abilities for events that are contrary to their religious beliefs.

Our Constitution says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” It is my hope that the pope’s words reach all corners of our country reminding Americans that we need to return to the guiding principles upon which our nation was founded, including free expression of religion and religious tolerance.

LAST UPDATED ON SEPTEMBER 28TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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