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Congressman Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Freedom of Faith

AUGUST 10TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Freedom of Faith

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America, in her earliest days, was founded as a safe haven for religious people. After our founding fathers fought a revolution and established this liberty, many Europeans fled persecution of their faiths and suffered a long, perilous pilgrimage to America to find free land. A land of people united in establishing a country unlike any other seen before, a union of free states governed by people with the freedom to live according to their own individual conscience and religious beliefs.

Religious liberty is easily taken for granted in the United States, where we are separated from hundreds of years of religious persecution on the other side of the world. Today millions of Christians still face exile, prison, torture, or worse simply for practicing their faith. ISIS regularly kills people who practice other religions and kidnaps and beheads Christians. In Africa, Boko Haram is holding hostage Leah Sharibu, a 15-year-old Christian girl kidnapped from Nigeria who refuses to denounce her faith. Iran has raided several house churches and sentenced 52 people who have converted religions to long prison sentences. And Turkish officials have been holding American pastor Andrew Brunson hostage since October 2016.

President Trump is taking important steps to guarantee religious protections within U.S. borders. President Trump's administration established the Religious Liberty Task Force this week and has issued executive orders to federal agencies making clear that "Americans do not give up their freedom of religion by participating in the marketplace or interacting with government." When our founding fathers established freedom of religion, it wasn't just freedom of worship. My father was a preacher, I know that true religious liberty isn't just choosing where you can gather and worship with like-minded people, it's the ability to live out your faith in all aspects of your life.

"Nothing is more dreaded than the national government meddling with faith," wrote John Adams in 1812, but unfortunately today there are many who want the federal government to force religious people into actions against their consciences and their beliefs. Two states are now suing the Little Sisters of the Poor, an Order of Catholic nuns devoted to caring for the elderly and sick, to force them to provide contraceptives under Obamacare. And it's not just the nuns they're after – organizations are suing to prohibit any religious expression on the graves of the soldiers who died for our freedoms.

The 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a troubling split decision that the Peace Cross, a 90-year-old memorial in Maryland dedicated to soldiers who gave their lives for the United States in World War I, was unconstitutional. The court applied a broad definition of "inherently religious" symbols, even though the American Legion funded and built the memorial which was specifically designed to symbolize the soldier's grave markers at their final resting place on foreign soil. This decision is troubling because it could undermine freedom of religion in the entire country. It could lead to the federal government taking down many federal monuments and historical places that use a cross or other "inherently religious" symbols, including at Arlington National Cemetery. I filed a judicial brief with Senator Ted Cruz and Representative Steve Scalise, arguing the Supreme Court should side with the American Legion and preserve the memory of fallen soldiers and their religious faith. In America we cherish the right to live your religion freely, and the federal government should not rob the soldiers who died for our freedoms and their loved ones their last expression of faith.

As a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, I am ensuring the U.S. tax code does not discriminate against people of faith. I've written legislation barring the government from forcing religious organizations to pay for services against their religion, and I've coauthored a bill that guarantees religious people who participate in health care sharing ministries will receive the same tax deductions available to others. Whether it's guaranteeing religious organizations who provide adoption services can continue to do so within their beliefs or making sure the tax code is fair to people of all faiths, I will

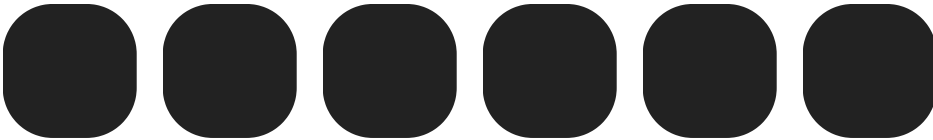
continue to support legislation that protects our individual freedom of faith.

Religious liberty means more than the freedom to worship where you want, our founding fathers intended it to mean the freedom to practice and live out your faith in all aspects of your life. President Trump and I share the view that when the federal government forces people to purchase or do things against their religion, it is a violation of our founding fathers' intentions and the freedom our country was founded on. Defending our 'first freedom' against liberal organizations pushing the government to interject into religion will preserve America as a land where people can freely live their faiths.

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