



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor Hearing:
“Do No Harm: Examining the Misapplication of the Religious Freedom
Restoration Act”
June 25, 2019**

“The First Amendment of the United States Constitution declares that Congress may make no law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Our founding fathers reiterated this principle at every stage: that people are fundamentally free, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these, the ability to worship freely. Many of the first settlers of our country crossed the ocean in search of this very freedom that we are discussing here today. Members present in this room come from a diverse range of social, economic, and religious backgrounds -- surely, this pillar of our nation’s founding cannot be lost on us. The right of Americans to practice their religion freely and conduct their business, without unnecessary interference from the government, is as important in 2019 as it was in 1620, in 1776, and in 1789.

Not too long ago, Congress reaffirmed the significance of this basic human right by passing the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993*, with nearly unanimous bipartisan support. RFRA stands as our nation’s primary religious liberty statute, enacted to ensure that all Americans can freely express their faith without fear of discrimination. It recognizes the importance of all religious faiths, including religious minorities, and offers a safe haven for anyone seeking to practice their religion freely, by providing a sensible balancing test that allows individuals exercising their religious beliefs a fair hearing under the law.

It is unacceptable that Congressional Democrats, starting in earnest during the last administration, have consistently ignored how clear the First Amendment is in affirming religious practice as a fundamental human right. Actions by Democrat legislators in the name of political point-scoring have eroded the rights protected

by RFRA and harmed those who wish to exercise their constitutional right to freedom of religion.

The *Affordable Care Act* and other policies of the Obama administration have imposed countless coverage mandates for contraception and abortion coverage that attempt to force individuals to violate their religious beliefs. Small business owners and religious groups have spent tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours, defending their values and consciences. And the Supreme Court has ruled time and again that these attempts to limit religious expression are unlawful.

We have long stood as a nation set apart from other nations because of the promises and principles of our First Amendment. Our individual liberties are the envy of people across the world, and our freedom of thought and expression are the cornerstone of this democracy. Now more than ever, it is vital that we safeguard these fundamental rights.

I stand with all House Republicans, and any Democrats willing to put aside politics in the best interest of the people, to defend religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities to worship freely. We will continue to oppose all policies that undermine the United States Constitution and that disrespect and diminish the faith of any American

House Republicans will also continue our steadfast support for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and will fight any attempts to diminish or weaken the law, which has served our country well for over 25 years.

Lastly, it's good to see you, Congressman Kennedy and Congressman Johnson. As we all know, Congressman Kennedy's legislation to limit the scope and application of RFRA is solely within the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee. As such, Congressman Kennedy's time in particular would likely be better spent speaking before our colleagues on that Committee. Regardless, I thank both of my colleagues in advance for their testimony, and I hope we can all work together to protect the Constitution of the United States."

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