

Resolution Affirming Freedom of Conscience

WHEREAS, America is the land of opportunity.

WHEREAS, we are stronger because we are different.

WHEREAS, the freedom of conscience and the right to the free exercise of religion is a fundamental American idea that extends beyond the walls of a church, mosque or synagogue.

WHEREAS, diversity promotes the principle that while we all may come from different backgrounds, and hold different religious views, we can live peaceably and respectfully with one another.

WHEREAS, we support the right of every American to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, and believe the best way to achieve this is to encourage free markets, and limited government interference.

WHEREAS, in a free market the government should not be forcing anyone to violate his or her religious beliefs.

WHEREAS, every American has the right to life and work faithfully;

We respectfully request that Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson drop his lawsuit against Barronelle Stutzman of Arlene's Flowers and ask the Legislature to take appropriate steps to ensure that Washington's business climate never requires someone to choose between their job and their conscience.

Agreed this day _____, 2015
in Kennewick, Benton County, Washington

Signed, _____

[This is a copy of the "Resolution Affirming Freedom of Conscience" submitted by Kennewick City Councilman John Trumbo, to the Kennewick City Council for their full consideration and adoption.]

TALKING POINTS

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE RESOLUTION

This resolution affirms that Washington State and our Nation have established in their respective constitutions that freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are essential in guaranteeing democracy of and for the people.

This resolution, despite the protestations of some, is not about discrimination, nor is it an instrument to promote any particular faith, culture or person, regardless of their gender, age or race, above any other person. The proposed resolution is totally absent of such language.

This resolution has no bias, intended or otherwise, pro or con to any religion. As presented, this resolution offers equal benefit for all persons, preferring none as better than another. Any interpretation otherwise is a misreading and misunderstanding.

Let's be clear... this resolution also carries no mention of a creator, or of a god, or to Jesus, Mohammed, Moses or any other prophet. It is entirely empty in reference to Christianity or any religion in any way.

The intent of the resolution is to clarify that freedom of religious conscience is a personal choice in which government has no right to interfere. The authorities of government must not be allowed to dictate to a citizen of this State and this great Nation how people are to live their lives in obedience to their conscience.

Mr. Mayor, what I am seeking here, is the full council's endorsement of this fundamental right. Unfortunately, this right has been undermined by a state law that threatens to corrode our freedoms that are written into our founding documents.

Fortunately, we have an opportunity to stand tall in defense of all Washingtonians. Barronelle Stutzman has courageously provided that opportunity. According to the state Attorney General Ms. Stutzman broke the law. OK, fine, but what about the law itself? Is it good for all of us? Man-made laws are just that, made by man.

Many bad man-made laws have been put on the books, only to discover later that it took acts of civil disobedience to get those bad laws removed.

Ms. Stutzman's actions challenge this ill-fitting law. She is forcing us to consider what we will do and how each of us will respond to our own consciences.

This resolution is vitally important. We should not simply let it drop to avoid whatever criticism may come. The mere fact that emotions and passions are as intense as they are, proves that this is an issue that must be faced.

I direct your attention to our congressional Representative Dan Newhouse, and to from 8th District state Representative Brad Klippert. They, too, have strong feelings favoring a resolution for freedom of conscience as expressed in recent letters. Ours is a government of, for and by the people — at all levels of government.

Critics of this resolution insist that we should forget this matter and attend to issues of greater local import such as paving streets and building better communities. To that I say, what could be more important and local than to stand with principle and conviction in defense of freedom? A better community is more than infrastructure, more than great retail centers, beautiful parks and a world-class carousel. Pasco City

Councilman Bob Hoffman pointed out in his opinion piece for the newspaper that local leaders often must address issues outside the normal routine of a consent agenda. It is our duty and responsibility to also consider what is best for the people who live and will live here. We want to ensure that we have a safe and secure city where we will continue to be known as a great place to raise families, and where basic freedoms are protected.

This council rejected marijuana for our city. We took heat for it, but our decision was wholly consistent with the people in Kennewick and Benton County who in 2012 voted a strong 56.4 percent against Initiative 502. How much more should we consider the voters who in that same election rejected Referendum 74, known as same-sex marriage, by 63.2 percent. There's a message there as we consider the conscience of Barronelle Stutzman who respectfully said no to providing flower arranging services at a gay couple's marriage.

As a final point, this resolution does not create or encourage discrimination. People who promote that view have inserted that argument into this issue. Rather, this resolution is wholly in concert with the theme of freedom that echoes in our constitutions, state and national. Freedom is an inherent part of our society today. Denying individuals the right to obey their consciences is the wrong direction for our society. Approving this resolution will send a strong message to our state Legislature, and to the people who came tonight, that we care enough about doing the right thing to just do it. Thank you for hearing me out. And thanks to councilman Bob Parks who on June 2 declared that I should at least have the courtesy of a vote on the resolution.

FAST FACTS
Resolution Affirming Freedom of Conscience

Amendment 1, U.S. Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Washington State Constitution, Article 1, Section 11: Religious Freedom

Absolute freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment, belief and worship, shall be guaranteed to every individual, and no one shall be molested or disturbed in person or property on account of religion;

Benton County Election results (November 2012) **82 percent turnout**

Referendum 74, Same-Sex Marriage	Y = 29,109 votes	36.8 percent
	N = 50,007 votes	63.2 percent
Initiative 502, Marijuana	Y = 34,530 votes	43.6 percent
	N = 44,686 votes	56.4 percent

Franklin County Election results November 2012

Kennewick statistics 78,000 population 36,449 registered voters

Response to Critics

Dear Sir/Madam

I appreciate your taking the time to comment regarding the proposed Freedom of Conscience resolution pending before the Kennewick City Council. I want you to know this is not about discrimination. It is about ensuring that all people in our state be allowed to choose what they are willing to participate in according to their consciences. I agree with you that a business owner does not have the right to discriminate by refusing to provide goods or services that would otherwise be available to the public at their place of business or as part of the normal course of doing business. But if I were asked to participate in an event such as a wedding where it would be against my beliefs or personal ethics, I would have to refuse — even as a paid participant. I stand against any law that forces me to join an activity which is against my conscience.

This is exactly the situation with Arlene's Flowers. I don't know if you have a particular moral sensibility or cultural/ethnic mores that you adhere to, but if you do, then that's what I'm talking about. For example, it might be offensive to some people of Native American Heritage to join in an event that they believe is offensive to their long-held traditions or desecrates their traditional sacred sites. We have such an area at Columbia Point. Or, it could be offensive to a business person of Muslim culture/faith or Jewish heritage to participate as a food server or entertainer/musician at a luau where pig was being roasted as the main course. Would you expect people you count among your friends to willingly provide paid services for a KKK-sponsored public event? Perhaps not. I know of or about people whose strong beliefs that prevent them from participating in certain holidays (Christmas, Easter and Halloween as examples) and cultural holidays. It is their choice to do so. Mandating they join in would be very wrong.

Hiring business people to provide service (catering, entertainment, publicity, decorations) at those events/holidays should be respectful of the individuals' moral and ethical beliefs. In the above examples, the consciences of the persons involved should be respected. That is all I am saying here. And that is all that this freedom of conscience resolution is trying to do. This is not about discrimination. It is about respecting the consciences of all people, regardless of faith, culture, creed, gender, age or race. Please don't think that it is anything more.

The amount of misinformation being circulated by emails, the internet, Facebook, etc. is very harmful in this discussion. Please consider carefully what I am trying to make clear here. The Freedom of Conscience resolution is for all our benefit, including yours.

Respectfully,
John Trumbo/Kennewick Council