

Got Religious Freedom?

CONVOLUTED REASONING SPINS IN ANTI-GAY CIRCLES

In the U.S. your freedom of — and from — religion is protected. Everyone's is. Under federal law, you have the right to believe or disbelieve whatever you want, to practice (or not) any religion you choose, and to attend the church, synagogue, mosque, temple, coven, or faerie circle of your liking — if any. That's a lot of freedom.

But is it enough? A group of Oregon's anti-gay Christians, going by the catchy name "Friends of Religious Liberty" (an offshoot of the homo-hating Oregon Family Council) want more freedom than that. They want their very own special freedom — the freedom to discriminate.

At first they tried to put a "Protect Religious Freedom" measure on Oregon's November ballot arguing that "religious convictions" should be a valid reason to refuse services, facilities and goods related to same-sex weddings. But when the ballot initiative titles came out, the Freedom Protectors dropped their petition project tout suite. I guess they didn't like the wording Oregon's attorney general assigned to their bill, which was something along the lines of "Gives homophobes the right to be a-holes." Haha, JK.

In any case, come November, we will not be

voting to legalize discrimination. Yay.

These so-called Friends of Religious Liberty are persistent, though. They've re-girded their loins and are now marching off to defend the religious freedom of one particular Gresham baker who refused to bake a cake for a couple of brides-to-be. They claim the baker, found to be in violation of Oregon's non-discrimination laws, was the one discriminated against.

The Friends of Religious Liberty support believers who believe their religion deems same-sex marriage too totally gross and icky to even bake a wedding cake. They believe *they* are the ones being discriminated against by non-discrimination laws. *They* need legal protection.

Of course they already have it. Not the freedom to violate nondiscrimination laws, but queer-averse Christians' freedom to believe and espouse whatever beliefs they want actually is protected. They're also protected from discrimination in housing, employment or public accommodations anywhere in this country, unlike, by the way, LGBTQ people, who have no such protection in 29 states. Here in Oregon we fought hard to finally include sexual orientation in our non-discrimination laws — and

yes, religion is there, too. Always has been.

Still, they intend to sue Oregon for enforcing Oregon's nondiscrimination laws. Good luck with that.

They're fighting a losing battle. Oregon just joined the pantheon of marriage equality states and opened the doors of matrimony to all couples who care to enter. (Sorry, thrupples and other types of bonded love units not yet included.) This really makes the religious freedom fighters fighting mad, making such statements as, "The redefinition of marriage and state policies on sexual orientation have created a climate of intolerance and intimidation for citizens who believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman and that sexual relations are properly reserved for marriage."

Say wha'? Right-wing Christians are the victims of intolerance and intimidation? Don't even try to wrap your mind around that. Their convoluted reasoning will have your head spinning so hard you'll be tempted to call an exorcist — which I believe would be your constitutionally protected religious freedom.

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow has been exercising her freedom in her Eugene Weekly column since 1999.



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