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Behind the Quixotic, Bipartisan Campaign to Create a New National Holiday

People are coming together to try and make Freedom Day happen.

By Emma Roller

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Imagine a special day each year when employees from Koch Industries and the Center for American Progress can link arms, sing Kumbaya, and agree to disagree.

That special day is Freedom Day—a holiday being proposed by think tanks and "thought leaders" across the ideological spectrum to encourage Americans to celebrate the freedoms afforded to them by the Constitution.

On April 13, representatives from the Aspen Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society, and the American Civil Liberties Union—an unlikely bipartisan coalition—will travel to Philadelphia to [convene](#) a "national conversation about the future of freedom."

The holiday is being spearheaded by the National Constitution Center, which hopes to gather enough support from think tanks, businesses, and schools to make Freedom Day a nationally recognized event by next April—though not an official U.S. holiday. The first panel of the Philadelphia conference, titled "On the Front Lines of Religious Liberty," is apt given the religious-liberty law Indiana [passed](#) (and then [amended](#)) this week and a similar law [sent back](#) to the Arkansas legislature.

"We are thrilled to bring together such an impressive array of thought leaders to discuss what conservatives, liberals, and libertarians agree about the future of freedom," Jeffrey Rosen, the president and CEO of the National Constitution Center, said in a statement.

The daylong conference ends with a stand-up comedy set from Grover Norquist. In politics today, this is the closest you get (aside from the Gridiron Club Dinner, perhaps) to formalized bipartisan humor.

Frayda Levin, a philanthropist who sits on the board of Americans for Prosperity and Club for Growth, says she envisions the holiday as a national celebration of tolerance. She says Freedom Day would ideally help people tolerate and celebrate each other's differences.

"If you're walking down the street and you see somebody dressed wacko—tattoos, piercings, whatever—I think for a lot of us, the natural reaction is to go, 'Oh, isn't that horrible,'" Levin told *National Journal*. "Our natural reaction should be, 'Wow, am I glad I live in a country where people can do that.' And I think if we can foster that kind of acceptance, it then can be extended beyond just what you wear."

Levin stressed that Freedom Day wouldn't duplicate the message behind the Fourth of July.

"To me, it's not about America. It's about freedom," Levin said. "This is about personal liberty. It's not about a country freeing itself from another country's rule."

If anything, Freedom Day is meant to piggyback off the success of Earth Day, which Sen. Gaylord Nelson introduced in 1970. Roughly [20 million people](#) turned out that year to protest in support of environmental reforms. Like Earth Day, which became an annual occasion for classrooms to learn about ecology, Levin hopes Freedom Day will be an opportunity to teach students about their civil liberties.

While Freedom Day may not exist yet, National Freedom Day [already does](#). It takes place on February 1 and commemorates President Abraham Lincoln signing the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery.

But Levin says Freedom Day isn't meant to be a legal, federal holiday on which businesses would have to give their employees the day off.

"That would almost run counter to the whole feeling of the day, if you did it through a law," she said. "It might just be something where people talk about it at work. They go to Starbucks, and Starbucks loves to have these campaigns. They go, 'Today is Freedom Day! What's it mean to you?'"