



## **All conservatives agree: Stop harassing Christian bakers, florists, and wedding planners**

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While those who broadly consider themselves part of the “conservative movement” are not united on the definition of marriage, they all agree on one thing: the war on conscience is stifling, intemperate, and must come to an end.

At CPAC, the premier annual conservative political gathering, a panel of experts discussed marriage and the intensifying pressure for Christians to “bend to the will of the state.”

Two of the panelists supported marriage, while two supported the redefinition of marriage.

Guy Benson, the political editor of [Townhall.com](http://Townhall.com), who is openly homosexual, said the definition of marriage may not be guaranteed by the Constitution. However, he thinks all states should be required to recognize the marriage licenses issued elsewhere.

“If one state has legalized it, why should gay people in other states have to wait for their citizens to catch up to this right?” he asked.

Benson said he believes there has been a “generational” shift on the definition of marriage, to modest applause.

“I’m appalled by the deterioration of marriage among young people,” he said. “Straight people have ruined marriage by rampant immorality, no-fault divorce laws,” and other failures.

Ryan Anderson, a senior research fellow at the [Heritage Foundation](http://Heritage Foundation), said, “The problem here is that the redefinition of marriage in the public square makes it harder to actually defend marriage.” “Heterosexuals have made a mess out of marriage,” he said. “Legally redefining marriage will further exacerbate that mess.”

Changing the eons-long definition of marriage as the monogamous union of one man and one woman creates a scramble to grant “public recognition of whatever consenting adult romantic relationship you care most about.”

“That means there's a right to polygamous marriage or polyamorous marriage, a right to group marriage, temporary marriage, open marriage, closed marriage,” he said.

“If there is a right to marriage, then it needs to be a right to the truth about marriage,” Anderson continued. “We need to have these discussions. We have got to take a vote on it. We can't have it imposed on us by five people in robes called Supreme Court justices.”

Mollie Hemingway, senior editor of *The Federalist*, likened the judicial ruling redefining marriage to the *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion. Both said that, at last, the justices' opinion had “settled” the issue.

“In fact, what happened is that people started thinking more deeply about the issue of abortion, of state laws, of federal laws,” she said. “People are starting to think deeply” now about same-sex “marriage” and religious liberty.

Far from removing the issue from public debate, “I think we have just begun a long discussion,” she said.

Ilya Shapiro, senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said that “marriage is different than abortion, because there's no third party being hurt by marriage, so it's going to play out differently than the abortion debate.”

“The real battleground is not going to be about marriage. That pretty much is done,” Shapiro said. “The real battleground is religious liberty and freedom of conscience issues generally.”

“That is where the real battleground is going to be as the illiberal Left tries to impose their views on all of us,” Shapiro, a constitutional scholar, said.

That brought the panel, from disparate viewpoints and ideological influences, into overwhelming agreement.

“What we're seeing is more a crushing of dissent by a very tiny, vocal” minority, said Hemingway.

“Gratuitously,” Shapiro added.

Homosexuals seeking a wedding cake are not in an analogous position to blacks in the segregated South, who were denied access to a number of consumer goods and services due to their race. Numerous other bakers would have been willing to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex ceremony, yet the lawsuits continue to go forward against faith-oriented businesses.

If dozens of other vendors would be willing to bake a wedding cake or make a floral arrangement for a homosexual ceremony, “why does this particular one need to be forced to bend to the will of the state? Beyond these religious issues, there is a free speech First Amendment issue there.”

“What co-existence really looks like in America today is disagreeing with someone on marriage and not trying to sue their business out of existence because they disagree,” Benson said to thunderous applause in the chamber of mostly young people.

Benson said he saw the assault on free speech joining around a single message. “Don't impose your beliefs on me, except when we're going to do it.' That's often how the Left thinks,” he said.

Although they clashed and came to differing conclusions, Anderson praised Shapiro and Benson for being “willing to engage in that debate. He doesn't think it's a debate between his side and idiots and bigots.”

They agreed that tolerance should never be interpreted as the vanquishing of other viewpoints. “Toleration assumes disagreement,” said Hemingway.