



# Religious Freedom is Everyone's Business

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*Commentary by Derrick Morgan, vice president for domestic and economic policy at The Heritage Foundation.*

Across social media last week, [some in the Twittersphere](#) claimed family businesses fighting for a fundamental freedom want to impose their religious and moral beliefs on their employees.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The distortion is part of a fierce national argument into which [the Supreme Court is about to wade](#). One side insists government must force all to agree with them. The other wishes simply to be left alone to pursue their own occupations in accord with their conscience.

In a reversal of commonly held stereotypes, many so-called progressives now seek government-enforced conformity. The left used to argue that we should be free to live without fear of government sanction. Today they insist everyone agree with them – or else.

President Barack Obama's health care law includes a mandate that employers must provide coverage of drugs that can cause an early abortion – without cost to the employee. Some object on religious grounds and on March 25, two family-owned businesses – one is evangelical, the other Mennonite – will get their day before the Supreme Court.

The Constitution and a law called the [Religious Freedom and Restoration Act](#) provide a check against unreasonable government coercion. Before imposing a substantial burden on those with sincerely held religious beliefs, the government must show a compelling interest, pursued through the least restrictive means.

This fair balance ensures that government properly respects all people, including religious minorities. It also makes sense for the law to apply at our workplaces. As first lady Michelle

Obama has [said](#), “Our faith journey isn’t just about showing up on Sunday . . . it’s about what we do Monday through Saturday as well.”

For [Hobby Lobby](#) and [Conestoga Wood](#), the two family businesses making arguments before the Supreme Court this month, their faith journey includes paying fair wages and providing health care to their employees. It also means not paying for abortion-inducing drugs.

Under the Obamacare regulation imposed by the Department of Health and Human Services, the two businesses face fines of \$36,500 per year, per employee if they don’t provide coverage of those drugs. Even if they drop health care coverage altogether to avoid the mandate, they would still face government penalties. The Green family, which owns the Hobby Lobby chain, and the Hahn family, which owns Conestoga Wood, simply seek relief from the court so they can continue to provide insurance for their employees.

The issue in these cases gets at the heart of what religious freedom is and who will get to determine where one’s faith is lived out. Throughout the creation and implementation of the mandate, the Obama administration essentially has argued that faith should remain a private affair: You can practice your beliefs in the four walls of your home or house of worship, but your religious freedom ends when you go into business.

But, as Cato Institute’s Ilya Shapiro points out, that’s not a view in line with the Constitution’s protection of religious freedom. He [writes](#):

“These individuals don’t check their religious values at the office door... The government can’t force individuals to forfeit their free exercise rights when they incorporate a business – just as it can’t force them to forsake these liberties when they enter the workforce, attend school, or engage in any other secular pursuit.”

You don’t need to agree with the Greens or Hahns about abortion to recognize that government shouldn’t coerce these families into paying for coverage of potentially life-ending drugs and devices.

Shapiro notes: “Americans understand intuitively that the essence of religious freedom is that government can’t willy-nilly force people to do things that violate their religious beliefs.”

In fact, polling shows that [nearly 60 percent](#) of likely voters oppose the Obamacare mandate that is trampling on families’ ability to live and work according to their beliefs.

For lovers of liberty, it’s time to hope the Court will stop the left’s drive to empower the state to trample the consciences of our neighbors.

*TheBlaze contributor channel supports an open discourse on a range of views. The opinions expressed in this channel are solely those of each individual author.*