

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# After *Hobby Lobby* case, get ready to oppose more state religion

BY JEFF BORG

**T**O GET OUT OF JURY DUTY, TRY reciting the Bill of Rights. It worked for me. No, that was not my objective. But the defense counsel asked if anybody knew the First Amendment, then called my name.

I had been practicing. So I blurted out, "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



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assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." The prosecutor marked a big X on her chart.

Freedom from religion: Why are many Americans still so afraid of it?

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court made the problem worse, opening up a new religious exemption. It allowed *Hobby Lobby*, a corporation created by the state of Oklahoma, to opt out of certain health-care coverage based purely on religious conviction.

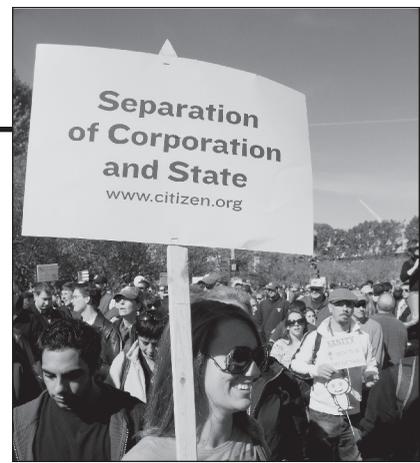
During the last Florida legislative session, I was shocked to hear leaders evangelize as if they were preaching at a revival. During Miami-Dade County Commission meetings last year, chapter board member Luis Amato counted two Jewish prayers; nine Christian invocations; and 15 moments of silence with bowed heads. Chair Rebecca Sosa once told her flock, "Those who don't want to be part of the invocation can stay outside, please."

Merging church and state costs us money. Churches/temples/mosques do not pay income, sales, or property taxes. Clergy exclude housing expenses from their incomes, including rent, mortgage principal, interest, down payments, fees, insurance, furnishings, even cable. So the rest of us pay more.

On the basis of religious belief: Employers fire LGBT workers; schools fire women for getting pregnant; bridal services turn their backs on same-sex couples; pharmacies refuse to fill birth-control prescriptions; hospitals deny certain services to certain people.

Somehow I got on the mailing list of a legal ministry called the Alliance Defending Freedom. Its fund-raising pitch claims that the ACLU wants to "wipe away almost every public expression and influence of Christianity from our culture" and that we "bully schools, colleges, local governments, businesses, and individuals."

Actually, we work to prevent groups from imposing their religion on you.



JEFF BORG

## Do corporations have religious rights?

The allegation that America was founded on Christianity is counterfactual. George Washington said, "The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, coined the expression separation of church and state in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut. James Madison, author of the Bill of Rights, wrote, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

John F. Kennedy, who had to overcome anti-Catholic attitudes to be elected president, said, "I believe in an America... where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials..."

In the wake of *Hobby Lobby*, the ACLU withdrew support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act because it contained a gaping religious exemption (see article on page 4). Then President Obama stepped up to sign an executive order — without religious exemption — prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating against LGBT employees.

Now you can do something powerful locally to advance liberty: Join the chapter's new Public Policy Committee, which formulates recommendations to the board and organizes outreach to legislators, commissioners, and other officials. Contact Charles Fischer, the chair, at [charlienj@gmail.com](mailto:charlienj@gmail.com).

