



2015 State of the Family Address

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Prepared Remarks

Good evening. Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends and families watching across America, I welcome you to this special state of the family address here at the headquarters of Family Research Council in Washington, D.C.

Tomorrow night President Barack Obama will speak to Congress in the annual State of the Union Address. While this traditional speech focuses on the year past as well as the President's proposals for the coming year, it's fitting that we also use this occasion to discuss topics that are perennial and even a few that are eternal.

When someone we love is in trouble, we do all we can to help. That's true for families and for good friends. And tonight, it's true for our country. The state of our union is only as strong as the state of our family. So this evening, I want to address the state of faith, family, and freedom in America. These are issues of great importance, as their impact goes beyond today's economy or the next election. They will determine our future and our children's future.

The issue that weighs especially on my heart tonight is that of religious liberty – the freedom that every American has been endowed with by our Creator – to acknowledge the divine Author of our liberties and to live in accordance with His precepts, as we understand them. Tonight, in the United States of America, the consensus about religious liberty that we have long enjoyed is being chipped away at with each rap of the gavel of an activist judge or human rights tribunal. In the examples that follow, and in the people you will meet tonight, that growing indifference and even hostility toward religion, at the hands of our own government and the pain it is inflicting, will be obvious.

But let me make one thing plain at the outset. While we must truthfully acknowledge and address the problems facing our nation, we must still celebrate the vast blessings that arise from our freedoms and the ability we maintain to preserve those blessings not only for this generation but for those generations yet to come.

To understand the value of religious freedom, we must first understand how it is essential to the dignity of every American, to families, and to our society and even our democratic system

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of government. Religious freedom is essential to promote the view that all humans have dignity. Moreover, the individual's dignity, as both history and the social sciences reveal, is aided and promoted best by the family, in which a mother and father love and respect each other and their children. Further, it is the family, and the individuals within it, that are essential to our communities, our economy and to the strengthening and flourishing of a free and open democracy. Therefore, when religious freedom is devalued, the worth of individuals, families, and ultimately our democracy are undermined. For some people today religious liberty is simply freedom of worship. They see it as a private act, a set of rituals enacted on a set day and at a set place – the neighborhood church, soaring cathedral, serene temple, or towering mosque. What they do not see is that religious liberty proceeds from and informs the core of the human being.

Sadly, some who have only the narrowest view of religious liberty dominate our government today. Their choice of the phrase “freedom of worship” is no accident. Their mission is to quarantine orthodox faith within the four walls of our church buildings. Fewer in number, but more aggressive, are those who think of religion as a poison and work to confine its operation not only in men's neighborhoods but in men's minds.

The story of religious freedom in America is quite unique, here the struggle for such freedom was central to our nation's self-understanding. And it was waged not just by the Church or by families who had fled shores hostile to their beliefs, but by America's Founders, nearly all religious men, who built a nation that would give wide berth to all creeds. The First Amendment is their handiwork. It is our heritage. And if America is to remain a nation of liberty, the First Amendment must remain at our country's heart.

While history shows us many instances of religious conflict, recent history is even clearer on the catastrophic cost of established irreligion. A century and a half of mass murders have proceeded at the hands of ideologies that hated God and sought to destroy all trace of Him and those who love Him.

Nazi Germany sought to replace God with the false worship of Aryan supremacy. Hitler dreamed of the removal of the Bible from every pulpit in Germany and its replacement with his manifesto *Mein Kampf*. He leveled a campaign against the Church, as well as Jews, believing historical Christianity a “scourge” and urged his aides to see Germany “immunized from this disease.” He believed that Christianity made men soft, unfit in his regime of eugenic purification. He despised the Gospels' great commandments of love and their basis in the transforming claim that all persons have equal value before their Creator.

Communism sought a similar immunization against Christianity based not on crude racism but brutal ideology. As Ronald Reagan stated in his address to the Conservative Political Action Conference in 1981, “The Communist vision is the Vision of Man without God. It is the vision of man's displacing God as the creative intelligence of the universe.” In the pursuit of that vision, Soviet Communism carried out purges that resulted in the deaths of millions.

In the Far East, under Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China (PRC), an estimated 60 million people were killed. The death toll from the march of communism in the last century exceeded 100 million people. And that does not count the

horrific toll that still engulfs the PRC, where millions of girls are missing, millions of mothers maimed, because of its ruthless campaign of forced abortion and sterilization under the one-child policy. The vision of man without God spares neither the womb nor the cradle.

From the very beginning of our nation, America's Founders raised a bulwark against such crimes. They set forth not only a vision of self-government but a conviction - a creed - that our freedoms are the unalienable gift of God. These freedoms can be assaulted or infringed, but they can never be erased because they are written, as Alexander Hamilton wrote, by the Hand of Divinity itself. We must never become indifferent to what has been won at such incredible cost. We stand here tonight to assert once more that we never will.

The threats America face are not potential - they are clear, present and dangerous. And ironically they come most sharply today not from the radical economic doctrines of Karl Marx, nor from the lights of what Winston Churchill called "perverted science," but from the darkness of unrestricted sexual license – a new Cultural Revolution – gone mad.

Tonight, we are honored to have with us several families who have borne the brunt of this revolution and its relentless demands. The Hahn family is with us here tonight. They are quintessential Americans. They operate a cabinet-making business in Pennsylvania. Because of their unshakable belief in the sanctity of each and every human life, they sought liberation from President Obama's unfair mandate that they fund drugs that can cause abortion under their company insurance plan. The federal government demanded they comply, or face crippling fines of up to \$3 million per month. By the grace of God and the help of our friends at Alliance Defending Freedom, the Hahns took their case to the United States Supreme Court and prevailed by a 5-4 vote. Today nonprofit groups such as Little Sisters of the Poor are still fighting the Obama Administration in the courts, but the Hahns have shown us, by their prayerful example, a path to victory.

With us here tonight as well is the Bracy family of Connecticut. The ironies in their case are profound. Barth Bracy works across the state line from Connecticut as executive director of Rhode Island Right to Life. In that role, he fought, as did FRC and so many others, for an amendment to prevent the federal government from subsidizing health insurance plans that cover elective abortion. When the 2013 Obamacare plans were launched, Connecticut offered no pro-life plan. Once again the Alliance Defending Freedom stood by their side, bringing suit on the Bracys' behalf against the Connecticut health care exchange. Thankfully, in its second year, Connecticut offered a pro-life plan. The Bracys have withdrawn their suit, but they know the battle is far from over. Other states still offer no pro-life plans and Obamacare is forcing every American to subsidize hundreds of insurance plans in dozens of states that pay for elective abortions.

As grotesque as the Obamacare mandates are, the attacks on religious liberty surrounding marriage feature something even more sinister. Government entities are seeking to force small business owners to actively participate in ceremonies that violate their moral conscience. For Oregonians Aaron and Melissa Klein, who are also with us here tonight, the attack on religious liberty is also an attack on their family's livelihood. What happened to this courageous young couple, owners of a bakery called Sweet Cakes by Melissa, was not sweet at all.

When the Kleins politely declined to make a wedding cake for two women seeking to get married under a federal court ruling that struck down Oregon's pro-marriage referendum, the women filed a complaint under Oregon labor law. The Oregon Bureau of Labor fined the Kleins \$150,000, a sum that will bankrupt them and their five small children. In the state of Oregon's view, the Kleins need to be "rehabilitated" from their religious views on the nature of marriage. Needless to say, government re-education regimes are not the American way.

Similar actions are being taken against other families across the country – bakers, wedding photographers, innkeepers, and owners of reception halls – even churches that operate such facilities. A government able to bankrupt people for standing by their beliefs, on marriage or any other matter of conscience, is a government of unbridled power and a threat to everyone's freedom.

In Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, Victoria Miller, owner of a bridal salon called W.W. Bridal Boutique, faced media scorn when she declined to provide wedding dresses for a same-sex ceremony. Victoria, we welcome you tonight. I am pleased to report that last month the Bloomsburg town council decided against drafting an ordinance that would have compelled businesses like Victoria's to service an event it cannot morally support.

The punishments being meted out by our government against those who continue to believe the same as President Obama did up until two years ago, that marriage is a union of a man and a woman, are designed to demand that Americans "Get in line or else lose their ability to make a living."

Last year we welcomed Craig James to the FRC team to aid in blocking the bullies who are trying to advance religious bigotry. Craig was an all-star at Southern Methodist University as a member of one of the most famed running back tandems in college football history, and he earned a slot in the Pro Bowl in only his second season with the New England Patriots. Despite his illustrious credentials both as a player and commentator, this true patriot lost his job with a regional Fox Sports network in 2013. Why? Because he spoke his own mind, on his own dime and his own time, about the issue of redefining "marriage" during his run for the Republican Senate nomination in Texas. Yes, Fox Sports is a private business and can hold whatever corporate views it likes. But we are in a new day in America when a traditional view on an issue of public policy leads, as it now so often does, to harassment and dismissal.

Earlier this month the Mayor of Atlanta stoked the flames of religious intolerance when he fired the city's distinguished Fire Chief, Kelvin Cochran, for a book he wrote in connection with his role as a deacon at an area Baptist church. Cochran wrote, "Sex was created for procreation and should be within the bonds of holy matrimony between a man and woman." The cycle of bigotry and discrimination is complete. Craig James was fired by a private company for his publicly expressed views. Chief Cochran was fired by a public entity for his private views.

Abraham Lincoln once noted of his critics on the issue of slavery: they say "we must not call it wrong in politics because that is bringing morality into politics, and we must not call it wrong in the pulpit because that is bringing politics into religion." Lincoln rightly knew that the advocates of slavery did not want it discussed anywhere. And that is the view of the Cultural Revolutionaries on sexuality today.

My friends and fellow Americans, these conflicts go to the heart of what we believe gives a nation its character and vitality. These contests point out the interwoven nature of the institutions of civil society and the values that sustain them. If we lose one of those institutions – church, family, private associations, even small enterprises – it will be impossible to keep any of them.

Through these almost mystic mechanisms, communities thrive and nations prosper. Our colleague Dr. Pat Fagan has documented this deeper prosperity through the Marriage and Religion Research Institute. The data drawn from the government's own trove of sources, speaks with overwhelming power.

On every measure from criminal activity, to educational achievement, to fidelity and happiness in marriage, to personal productivity and longevity -- religious practice and intact family structure predict and produce the best results. The implications for government policy are profound: every dollar spent on a program to improve childhood education, reduce street crime, increase earnings, or spur invention is severely undercut by any government action that undermines family formation and religious practice. Religious freedom is therefore not a private preserve, an isolated set of observances, odd, quaint, and of faint importance to America. No, upon this fundamental freedom rests the whole of our republic.

Among the Founders, John Adams was clearest that our design for government would not, could not succeed, without religion. "Our system of government," he said, "was made for a moral and a religious people and is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Our system depends on citizens seeing and carrying out first their duties to God, then family, country and neighbor. A free people cannot have a government empowered to do what they must do themselves.

The warning signs are all around us. Our economy stagnates under heavy taxes and regulation of this administration. Our health care system is in shambles, shackled by government mandates and assaults on the doctor-patient relationship. Marriage is disappearing among the middle-class as out-of-wedlock births reach an all-time high of 41%. Racial tensions are growing.

And according to a new poll in the *Military Times*, President Obama, our Commander-in-Chief, has the approval of only 15% of the troops who serve under him, an astonishing figure. And the *Times* acknowledges, as do the rising ranks of soldiers, like Senior Master Sgt. Phillip Monk, and chaplains, like Capt. Joe Lawhorn, that hostility to traditional values, even to the Bible itself, is a major factor in collapsing morale. At the same time, distrust of government is rising. Each of these issues is urgent. But taken together, they constitute an unprecedented crisis for our country.

America stands at a point in history where we must see a spiritual, moral and cultural renewal in our nation. We call upon Christians across this nation to pray and to act. In the next few weeks we will be releasing a comprehensive agenda, but let me mention a few of the action steps we propose.

In October 1998 President Bill Clinton signed the International Religious Freedom Act. This law, built on the developing understanding, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognized that religious freedom is a fundamental human right. Despite that recognition, history makes plain that this right has ranked low on the list of U.S. foreign policy priorities.

Consider the case of Mariam Ibraheem. Last fall Family Research Council honored this heroic woman with our first Cost of Discipleship Award. Mariam was sentenced to death by an Islamic court in Sudan for the “crime” of converting to Christianity. While in prison, shackled to the floor, she gave birth to her second child. The aggressive pressure of dozens of members of Congress, including Congressman Mark Meadows who is with us tonight, our efforts here at FRC, sympathetic journalists, and most significantly prayers from around the world combined to secure her release.

As it is with individuals of courage like Mariam, so it is with entire groups. The martyrdom of people of faith, primarily at the hands of radical Muslims, proceeds at a terrifying pace in places like Nigeria, Sudan, Iraq, and Egypt. These are among the 16 nations the International Religious Freedom Commission has designated as countries of particular concern, with another 10 countries meriting close scrutiny. According to the most recent World Watch List report from Open Doors USA, which tracks the persecution of Christians worldwide, last year saw the most violence against Christians since the end of the Cold War.

We propose that the Obama Administration elevates the importance of religious freedom in foreign affairs, as a basic liberty essential to peace as well as justice, with stronger enforcement of the International Religious Freedom Act through our aid programs, and for sanctions against governments hostile to religious freedom.

Defending religious liberty abroad means standing for the bedrock American principle of human dignity, and it is in our vital interests. When America works to protect the liberties of the persecuted; we build friendships and create alliances that contribute to our own security.

Foreign events help us put our domestic struggles in better perspective, but we are approaching unmistakable turning points here at home. One of them deals with the dignity of life within the womb and the well-being of women vulnerable to a predatory abortion industry. Tonight we call on Congress to enact the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. The United States is one of only four nations on the planet to allow elective abortion throughout the entire term of pregnancy, including when at five months the unborn child can feel pain. Later this week the House of Representatives will take up this legislation, which it first passed in 2013, as a way to observe the 42nd anniversary of the tragic *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Second, if the pain bill shows the horror of abortion, we also should not fund it. Tonight we’re calling on Congress to act swiftly to pass the No Taxpayer Funding of Abortion Act. This Act is grounded in a principle that’s critical to conservatives, moderates, and liberals alike: People should not be forced to pay for abortion, or other acts that violate their moral conscience.

This principle is non-negotiable. As Thomas Jefferson put it, “No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority.”

We also call on Congress to pass legislation preventing government discrimination against those whose conscience and beliefs view marriage as a union of a man and woman. The Marriage and Religious Freedom Act prevents the federal government from doing to the Klein’s what Oregon has done, or what a town council in Pennsylvania almost did to the Millers.

There is another blot on our national conscience Congress must do more to erase. Millions of people become victims of forced labor and sexual slavery every year around the world, and in America there are thousands of girls and young women victimized in this horrible spiral of degradation.

The scourge of trafficking is due, in part, to the breakdown of the family, the proliferation of pornography, and a clear view that others are to be used and misused. And it’s hidden in plain sight in communities across America. In October, more than 250 victims of trafficking and 70 trafficking suspects were identified as part of a new anti-trafficking investigation in Fairfax County, Virginia, just a few miles from where we gather tonight. Congress has taken major bipartisan steps to combat trafficking, but more must be done. We urge the House and Senate to prioritize passage of measures that would help ensure that women, and especially minors, involved in sex trafficking are cared for as victims and not prosecuted as criminals and to offer girls and women swift and effective rescue. Abortion on demand and human trafficking compose a common league of evil. Ending that league is the abolitionist cause of our time.

Finally, this occasion compels me to mention an issue I first wrote about nearly a decade ago, in a book written with my friend Bishop Harry Jackson. It’s a special honor to have Bishop Jackson here tonight as we mark the 30th observance of the federal holiday known as the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

When we wrote our book *Personal Faith, Public Policy* we desired to model racial reconciliation as we saw racial division within the body of Christ as a scandal—a stumbling block to secularists who long saw that the nation’s most religious regions suffered from some of its worst racial prejudice. Over the past 50 years much progress has been made in building new bonds of solidarity in the church and in society, but looking around us today can we truly say that America has transcended the racial divide? As we wrote in our book, we are convinced that only the Church can deliver our nation from the fires and fetters of racial hatred. On this question, we come not to demand more of government, but more of ourselves.

We cannot turn the corner on rebuilding families, marriages, neighborhoods, health care systems, small businesses, or any other element of our society if we do not march together – “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,” but “all as one in Christ Jesus.”

As these words of the apostle Paul remind us, religious freedom is ultimately not a matter of exemptions and accommodations, acts of civil disobedience or gestures of resistance. Our freedom is for something. And our religious freedom is for everything. For overcoming ancient enmities. For peace in our hearts and in our homes. For reconciliation and growth in our

communities. For individual and neighborhood development. For respect and cooperation among neighbors. For the Truth that really does set us free.

As I close, I want to address one final question. What are we to do? We must choose to not be silent or retreat into isolation in our churches or insulation of our homes in the face of the threatening winds of intolerance and irreligion. No, we must choose to stand like the Hahns, the Braceys, the Klein's, the Millers, and the thousands of others like them that are standing for the timeless truths that define our nation and will secure our future. Let us join together in a renewed pledge to ensure that America remains, one nation under God, where faith, family and freedom flourish. Goodnight and God bless you.