

The North Carolina Legislature Reconvenes by Rollin Russell

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Hide the children and the silverware. The North Carolina Legislature is returning to Raleigh for its Short Session. The good news is: they probably cannot do as much damage to the character and reputation of our state as they did in just one day in the special session which rammed through House Bill #2. Companies are cancelling plans to locate facilities here. Entertainers are cancelling their concerts here. Professional sports leagues are reconsidering their commitments to hold headline events in North Carolina. Cities, counties and organizations are protesting and filing suits to strike down the law.

Contrary to our beleaguered and rattled governor's retort, it is not just a matter of "bathroom etiquette." The legislature used their feigned horror at a Charlotte City ordinance to strike down all municipal and county ordinances that protect the rights of LGBTQ citizens which go beyond the protections already in state law which are, for these particular neighbors, in a word, . . . none.

It is not as though they were oblivious to the furor they might incur. Indiana passed a similar law and had to walk it back in light of outraged protest. Georgia passed a similar law and it's governor was smart and courageous enough to veto it. Mississippi has now joined in with its own version. It is a race to the bottom in a clear effort to strike back at gay rights in general and marriage equality in particular.

The legislators base their actions on the claim to religious liberty, the "free exercise of religion" guaranteed in the First Amendment to the US Constitution. They are really violating that very clause in the Bill of Rights, namely its other half: we are to "make no law regarding an establishment of religion." The Legislature and the religious conservatives to whom they pander clearly want to establish in law the precepts of their own narrow gauge religion. It is unconstitutional and will be struck down. But in the meantime, it is creating havoc.

So, here they come again. What new travesty will they try to impose on us? Like other reactionary state legislatures, they take their orders from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an organization funded by zillionaires who want to hold and increase political power. It is time to get them and their legislative lackeys off our backs. It is time to take seriously their attempts to establish their religious precepts in law and government, in gross violation of the principle of Separation of Church and State.

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Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Orange-Durham Chapter