



Dear President Obama:

Religious liberty is a core value of the American people. The right to worship, or not, as each individual sees fit is a cherished part of what makes our nation special.

Americans may disagree about some issues related to religious freedom, but most would agree that the right to engage in the religious or philosophical practices of their choice without heavy-handed interference by the government is of paramount importance. Most Americans would agree that the government's role is to protect religious freedom, not to promote or sponsor religious worship or dogma.

Nearly 350,000 Americans from all walks of life came together to endorse First Freedom First, a special project of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Interfaith Alliance Foundation. First Freedom First sought to rally Americans around a set of principles related to religious liberty as expressed in a five-point petition.

These principles are:

- Every American should have the right to make personal decisions – about family life, reproductive health, end of life care and other matters of personal conscience.
- American tax dollars should not go to charities that discriminate in hiring based on religious belief or that promote a particular religious faith as a requirement for receiving services.
- Political candidates should not be endorsed or opposed by houses of worship.
- Public schools should teach with academic integrity and without the promotion of religious preference or belief.
- Decisions about scientific and health policies should be based on the best available scientific data, not on religious doctrine.

We believe it is significant that hundreds of thousands of Americans came together to endorse the specific points of the First Freedom First project. The petition covers a variety of issues, yet all are bound by a common theme: Government should protect religious exercise but not lapse into the promotion of faith. The latter is a job for America's faith communities.

Supporters of the First Freedom First project invite you to consider these issues as you transition into the White House and work to engage Americans in support of our First Amendment guarantee. We believe that a strong endorsement of religious liberty and its corollary, the separation of church and state, would be a welcome addition to your new administration as would other measures that reflect the spirit of the First Freedom First project.

Recent polls have underscored the value of America's unique religious liberty protections. Americans follow many different faith traditions, and many have chosen no spiritual path at all. Americans feel comfortable changing their religious affiliation or borrowing elements from other traditions. And while Americans respect the right of religious groups to address the issues of the day, they believe in equal treatment and do not want to see the views of one group elevated over all others.

The grand measure of liberty Americans enjoy would not be possible without the twin guarantees of religious freedom found in our First Amendment. We believe these values are worth celebrating, and we hope you agree.

Sincerely,

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