

Home Depot Shareholder Meeting Question
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May 19, 2016

I'm Justin Danhof of the National Center for Public Policy Research, a free-market think-tank and a company shareholder.

I would like an answer to a very simple question – does Home Depot oppose religious freedom?

As Georgia politicians debated whether to adopt a religious freedom bill known as “The Free Exercise Protection Act,” perhaps the biggest opponent of the bill was Georgia Prospers, a business coalition of which Home Depot is one of the most prominent members. Georgia Prospers lobbied hard against the bill and boasted when Governor Deal vetoed it, but I'm sorry to say much of its work was extremely dishonest and I truly doubt it aligns with Home Depot's values.

In its lobbying campaign, Georgia Prospers claimed the bill “legalized discrimination.” That's a sensational lie.

The federal government and 31 states have heightened religious freedom laws. Georgia's bill imitated these other laws. This is all these laws do. First, they say that the government should not interfere with an individual's religious freedom unless doing so is necessary to reach an important government goal. Second, they say that if the government can reach its important goal in a way that does not abridge religious freedom, it should choose the other method. That's it. The federal religious freedom restoration law was co-authored by Senator Ted Kennedy and signed into law by President Clinton. Its purpose is to protect religious rights, which are civil rights.

Religious freedom has been part of American jurisprudence since our nation's founding. The modern religious freedom laws have been on the books So it's fair to ask: why are Home Depot and others voicing objection to this basic civil right now?

Corporations and the mainstream media have expressed concern that religious freedom laws will lead to discrimination, in part, against homosexuals. There is zero evidence for this concern. These laws only require the government to avoid interfering with religious freedom if it can do so while still achieving important government goals – one of which, in every state of the union, is outlawing discrimination.

If Georgia Prospers does not in fact represent Home Depot and this company's values, I urge you to reconsider your membership in this organization. Until you either withdraw your membership – or denounce Georgia Prospers on this issue – Home Depot will just be another American company that has jumped on the anti-religious bandwagon. I hope the company is better than that.

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