

Atheists of Florida

A statement on the appointment of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court of the United States. Our concern is not with her technical qualifications but with her ability to support the constitution, specifically the separation First Amendment's establishment and free exercise clauses.

Religious freedom and civil rights may be at risk for women, LGBTQ, religious minorities, and the nonreligious.

Her involvement with a small group called People of Praise brings up many questions concerning her objectivity. They describe themselves as “a charismatic, ecumenical and covenant community”. People of Praise is headed by an all-male board of governors described as its “highest authority”. According to their website, “People of Praise members have experienced ... charismatic gifts as described in the New Testament”. Among the gifts, as defined by the New Testament, include the “laying on of hands”, “prophesying”, “distinguishing between spirits”, “speaking in different kinds of tongues”, and “interpretation of tongues”.

According to an article in The Guardian, who did interviews with former members of the group and a review of the group's own literature, they found an organization that appears to dominate some members' everyday lives, in which so-called “heads” – or spiritual advisers – make big life decisions, and in which members are expected to financially support one another. Married women count their husbands as their “heads”

Her opposition to the Affordable Care Act is based on her interpretation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). She has said “The simple fact is that the Obama administration is compelling religious people and institutions who are employers to purchase a health insurance contract that provides abortion-inducing drugs, contraception and sterilization. This is a grave violation of religious freedom and cannot stand.”

This allows RFRA to be used to ignore the rights of employees to have access to health care that covers all their needs and ignores that RFRA cannot be used to impose unjustified burdens on others.

Ms. Barrett served as a trustee for the Trinity School at Greenlawn, a private Catholic school affiliated with People of Praise, from 2015 to 2017. A parent handbook describes the school's commitment to the establishment of "Christian relationships" that adhere to "scripture and Christian tradition". "We understand marriage to be a legal and committed relationship between a man and a woman and believe that the only proper place for sexual activity is within these bounds of conjugal love." Since she has stated that respecting past Supreme Court decisions "is not a hard and fast rule", it would seem that marriage equality is at risk of being rescinded.

Currently there is a case in the courts concerning the use of RFRA to deny a woman and her family the ability to volunteer with children at foster care agency in South Carolina. Her application passed all the criteria except one – she is Catholic. The agency will only work with evangelical protestants. Last year this agency is reported to have received \$600,000 in taxpayer money. The website of the agency currently states that "God's design for marriage is the legal joining of one man and one woman in a life-long covenant relationship." This obviously means same sex couples need not apply, but does it also mean divorced people need not apply, so our President would not be considered to foster a child because he has been divorced 3 times? It is not clear if a single parent would be considered, even if they met all the requirements. It appears their employees must also meet their criteria of being an evangelical protestant. While she has not commented on this case, it would appear from her past statements that she would support the agency over the needs of the children.

We ask senators to seriously consider her objectivity and commitment to the constitution.