

## Do corporations have religious rights?

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### How far does religious freedom go?



**By Bob Martin, Publisher**

Hobby Lobby is a privately held retail chain of arts and crafts stores based in Oklahoma City. It was formally called Hobby Lobby Creative Centers. The company was founded on August 3, 1972, and as of 2012 had 550 stores in 45 states.

The company has filed litigation that has reached the U. S. Supreme Court which challenges whether or not the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, is constitutional. This past week, the high court heard oral arguments on the case.

The Free Exercise Clause, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), are both rooted in the sensible desire to avoid oppressing the private spiritual pursuits of Americans. So, in summary, the court will be answering the question as to whether or not for-profit corporations have the right to freely exercise religion, legal experts say.

The other, more intuitive issue is whether the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate, which applies to corporations that employ more than fifty people, infringes on the free exercise rights of religious corporations, should the Court determine that those corporations have such

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rights at all. Hobby Lobby's lawyers elected not to challenge the contraceptive mandate explicitly on First Amendment grounds, and have also based their case primarily on the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Thus, the essential question in this case is whether or not that act immunizes a corporation from a legal obligation that conflicts with the religious faith of the person running, or owning, the business organization. The Free Exercise Clause, and the RFRA, are rooted in the sensible desire to avoid oppressing the private spiritual pursuits of Americans and, argues the government lawyers, unless the new law is explicitly aimed at stifling "religious observance," the federal government should not need a "compelling interest" to justify its application to all citizens.

Hobby Lobby President, Steve Green, who claims he has distributed Bibles to a billion people worldwide through his personal ministry, asserts that he shouldn't be forced to participate in what he calls a life terminating contraception through the use of the morning after pill or other devices. This is going to be an interesting exercise by the high court and the opinion by the justices will be awaited with much interest.

### **Bentley gets an opponent**

The freshly minted Democratic candidate for governor has a resume very similar to our current governor, Robert Bentley. They are the same age at 71 and both are medical doctors. But that's about where the similarity ends.

Former Congressman Parker Griffith of Huntsville filed his qualifying papers on February 7, fifteen minutes before the deadline. He said he held off because he thought former Gov. Jim Folsom or State Sen. Billy Beasley of Clayton would seek the primary election but when it became clear they would not run, he decided to take the plunge. Griffith, a retired doctor who specialized in the treatment of cancer, served as a state senator before he was elected to Congress from the Fifth Congressional District. He was unseated from that position by Mo Brooks in 2010.

Griffith has already one-upped the governor on one issue, saying he would not take a salary no matter how low the state's unemployment rate goes, attempting to trump Bentley's promise not

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to take the governor's pay until the state's unemployment rate drops below 5.2 percent. It's now at 6.4 percent. Griffith will first have to win the Democratic Primary against Fayette businessman Kevin Bass before he can take on the current governor.

## **Alabama gets its share of federal dollars**

A recent national survey indicates Alabama gets more than its fair share of federal dollars. The website WalletHub reports that for every dollar we pay in income taxes to the federal government we get a return of \$3.28. That's more than 47 other states. In addition we have a large number of federal workers who bolster our other tax resources. It is far more than most of our neighboring states. For example Tennessee's return is only \$1.64 and Georgia's is \$1.05.

Bob Martin is editor and publisher of The Montgomery Independent. He is the publisher of The Millbrook Independent. Email him at: [bob@montgomeryindependent.com](mailto:bob@montgomeryindependent.com)