



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 26, 2014

Arizona State Senator Defends Religious-freedom Bill

An Arizona state senator went on national television to defend the state's controversial religious-freedom bill against the steady drumbeat of opposition in the media from business leaders and prominent Republicans who have jumped on the "gay rights" bandwagon in opposition to it. Senator Al Melvin, one of the GOP legislators who voted for the bill, went on CNN Monday to defend the measure, which would allow business people to deny service to homosexuals or lesbians if servicing events like same-sex weddings goes against their religious convictions.



In an [interview](#) with CNN's Anderson Cooper, Melvin argued it is the "media frenzy" over the bill, and not the legislators and others who supported it, that it is responsible for whatever damage the controversy has done to the state's reputation. Melvin described the bill as a response to secular attacks on traditional societal norms. "All of the pillars of society are under attack in the United States," Melvin said. "The family, the traditional family, traditional marriage, mainline churches, the Boy Scouts — you name it."

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When asked if the bill might also allow businesses to refuse services to other categories of persons, such as unwed mothers and divorced people, Melvin said, "I don't know of anybody in Arizona who would discriminate against another human being."

"Really?" Cooper replied. "I know people in New York who do. No one in Arizona discriminates?" That gave Melvin, a candidate for governor this year, an opportunity to defend Arizona's reputation against the implications of a New York newsman.

"Maybe you should move to Arizona," he said. "We're more people-friendly here."

The verbal sparring continued, with Cooper at one point asking Melvin whether and against whom Jesus might discriminate.

"I'm against all discrimination, and I want maximum religious freedom," Melvin said several times during the interview. "I know you're trying to set me up and I'm not going to stand for it."

Melvin's stand was in marked contrast to that of most other Republicans who have spoken out on the measure since the bill was passed last week, including three Republican senators who voted for the bill, SB 1062, but now say they've changed their minds. That reversal reflects the blitzkrieg of opposition to the bill, with prominent businessmen and both of the state's U.S. senators urging their fellow Republican, Governor Jan Brewer, to veto it. Former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich, a Republican presidential hopeful in 2012 and former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, have also weighed in on the measure, urging a veto. Brewer, who has maintained a strict silence about her intentions, has until Saturday to act on the legislation.



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Apple, Inc. which plans to open a manufacturing plant in Mesa that will employ up to 700, has also asked the governor to veto the bill, the Associated Press [reported](#), and Doug Parker, CEO of American Airlines Group, has done the same.

“There is genuine concern throughout the business community that this bill, if signed into law, would jeopardize all that has been accomplished so far,” Parker claimed. “Wholly apart from the stated intent of this legislation, the reality is that it has the very real potential of slowing down the momentum we have achieved by reducing the desire of businesses to locate in Arizona and depressing the travel and tourism component of the economy if both convention traffic and individual tourists decide to go elsewhere.”

The claim that Arizona would be harmed economically brings to mind a similar controversy in the 1990s when Arizona, along with New Hampshire, were the only states that had not adopted a state holiday in honor of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. The state not only lost tourist and convention business then, it also lost the nation’s biggest sporting event, the Super Bowl, in 1993, when the National Football League, following a vote by the Players Association, moved the game from the Sun Bowl in Tempe to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. Arizona is scheduled to host next year’s Super Bowl at the University of Phoenix in Glendale, and the NFL said Monday the league is monitoring the progress of the bill. The league’s Arizona Cardinals have expressed concern about the negative image it could bring the state, and the Arizona Super Bowl Host Committee has stated its outright opposition to the measure.

It has been Gov. Brewer’s policy not to comment on legislation before it is passed, and she gave no indication of support or opposition to the religious-freedom bill when it was in the House or Senate. She vetoed a similar bill last year, though it was during a stand-off between the governor and the legislature on other matters.

An estimated 350 people gathered outside the Arizona Capitol on Monday evening in a peaceful protest against the bill, listening to speeches and holding homemade signs. Meanwhile, Bob Worsley, one of the three Republican state senators who announced their change of mind after voting for the bill, expressed his regret. The trio was part of a unanimous 17-member GOP caucus supporting the bill. Had they joined with the 13 Democrats who opposed the bill when the Senate voted, it would have been defeated. Now they are asking the governor to veto what they voted for.

“I think laws are [already] on the books that we need, and have now seen the ramifications of my vote,” Sen. Bob Worsley told the AP. Worsley, Adam Driggs, and Steve Pierce were part of a unanimous 17-member GOP caucus voting in voting for the bill. “I feel very bad, and it was a mistake,” Worsley said.

While supporters of the bill point to a photographer and a baker in other states being sued for denying their services for same-sex “marriage” events, Scott Shackford, writing on the libertarian reason.com, said those occurred in states where sexual orientation is a protected category in anti-discrimination laws.

“I previously noted,” Shackford [wrote](#), “that sexual orientation isn’t covered by Arizona’s public accommodations law anyway, so whether SB 1062 is signed or not, businesses can already discriminate against gays in the state.”

Supporters of the bill say the point is not to empower anyone to discriminate against or in any way bring harm to those of a different “sexual orientation.” Rather it is to prevent people from forcing anyone to take part in events he or she may find morally repugnant. The bill does not, for example,



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prevent people planning a same-sex wedding from hiring a photographer of their choice to take capture and preserve the wedding ceremony and reception in pictures. It does, however, recognize the corresponding right of a photographer who believes such an event is a violation of moral law and his or her own religious beliefs to decline the invitation. The photographer in that case would not be doing anything to harm the participants at the wedding or any in any way impede their activities, but would merely be asserting the personal right to be left out of it.

The Center for Arizona Policy remains solidly behind the bill and is urging the governor to sign it. CAP is a conservative group that opposes abortion and same-sex “marriage.” Its president, Cathi Herrod, said the legislation is needed for protection against activist federal courts and insists it merely clarifies existing state law. “Instead of having an honest discussion about the true meaning of religious liberty, opponents of the bill have hijacked this discussion through lies, personal attacks, and irresponsible reporting,” said Herrod.

“Our elected leaders have a fundamental duty to protect the religious freedom of every Arizonan,” she said, “and that’s what SB 1062 is all about.”



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