



Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Sept. 8 2025 Hearing Transcript

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Second Hearing Transcript

September 08, 2025

Museum of the Bible

Washington, D.C.

Second Hearing Transcript

Mary Margaret Bush: Good morning. Welcome to the second hearing of the Religious Liberty Commission. I am Mary Margaret Bush, the Commission's director and designated federal officer. And it's my pleasure to announce the official opening of our proceedings today and to introduce our chairman, the lieutenant governor of Texas, Dan Patrick.

Chairman Patrick: Good morning.

What a great day God has made, right? Amen.

It's my honor to be the chair of this historic Commission. The President appointed me to serve as chair, and he appointed an outstanding committee of members that we will introduce to you very shortly.

For those of you here for the first time in the audience or watching for the first time, this is our second hearing. The first hearing was focused last June on our Founders, and what was it that they truly intended for us to have in the Bill of Rights through the First Amendment.

This magnificent inheritance that they handed down to generations that some have tried to take away from us.

For well over 100 years, religious liberty thrived and was strong in this country. And then, after World War II, pretty much it was when it began, the courts started chipping away at all of our rights.

In fact, had it not been for the Supreme Court at the time and other courts that followed, we would still have much of the liberty, religious liberty that we so cherish.

And our Founders gave us in the First Amendment signed in December 15th. 1791, as the very First Amendment: no establishment of a government religion, and to give us free exercise of our religious rights.

And this committee and the President understands that if you can take away religious liberty, you can take away every right that we have.

And that was so clear in our first hearing with our witnesses and our great questions from our committee members.

There was a time in this country when you could have a nativity scene in the town square and not worry about being sued. You could have a symbol in front of your home. The coach knew when to pray, and that was any time he wanted at school. And a student was not denied their rights of prayer. And men and women in our military had the right to pray as they chose, but no longer.

So, the President said, we must restore religious liberty in this country and make sure that every citizen--that's an applause--and make sure that every citizen understands those rights.

And that's part of that our Commission is. We will bring a report to the President next spring. We have several more hearings after this one. Today we are focusing on education, and we'll be doing so in three more weeks.

We'll be here in November. We go to Dallas for a hearing on religious liberty in our military, and then in Florida. We will go in February. Rather, we'll go to Florida because the weather might be a little difficult here in Washington.

And we will continue and give the President a report for either executive order or legislation that he may recommend Congress pass.

But one of our goals is to make sure America knows their rights. We know the phrase that no one should come between a doctor and a patient. Well, the President believes, and we believe no one should come between God and a believer. We know that if you're sick, no one would say, don't go to the doctor. And no one should say to someone who's troubled and lost and searching that you cannot search for God.

No one in government or the private sector should tell you when to pray, where to pray, or who to pray to.

We are a primarily a Christian nation, but this committee represents all faiths because that's what our Founders intended. People of all faiths.

So, this is our second hearing, and we will be graced in about an hour or so by the President of the United States, who will come and deliver a major address. And then we will proceed with our hearing after that. And we'll give you a little bit more details after the President speaks.

What we're going to do this morning is we're going to introduce several witnesses, children, parents, teachers who have been denied their rights and pretty much in some cases, pushed out of school because of their faith.

And then, after the President's speaks, and we take a break and reset the stage, we'll come back and then we will start our questions of those witnesses and have more witnesses throughout the day.

So, in our first hearing, I asked every member of the committee to have brief opening remarks, or minutes or so. And three of our members who are here today had previous schedules and could not be here, so I'm going to introduce them in a minute to make opening remarks. But first I want to introduce His Eminence, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, to come up and lead us in prayer.

Cardinal Dolan: Let us pray. Dear God and Father of us all, we confess here in our nation's capital that without you nothing is possible. With you, nothing impossible. We renew our rock-solid conviction that we are one nation under God. We daily, we daily, renew our trust, our belief that in God we trust. Yes, dear Lord, thank you for you have shed your grace on us, and we ask that you would continue to mend our every flaw which we admit we have our liberty to believe in you and exercise that faith freely comes from you, from nobody else, nobody, nowhere, no how can take it away. To protect and defend it, this first and most cherished freedom brings us together this morning in your most holy and powerful name. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Chairman Patrick: He said, is that okay? I said, yeah, I think that'll do just fine. That'll be fine. That's great.

So back in November, when the President and I started talking about this, he rattled off names he wanted on the committee right away.

And with the help of the Faith Office--which is the first Faith Office ever established by a President in the White House--so with the help of our White House team and the Pastor and the President and myself, we put together this team.

I wanted to introduce them to you right now, in no particular order, just how they're seated.

To my left, we have the vice chair of our committee, Doctor **Ben Carson**. The guy that I started working with last January--Vince Haley, head of the Domestic Policy Office. Bishop Barron, great

to have you with us. Pastor Franklin Graham. Author Eric Metaxas. And Carrie Prejean Boller and Allison Ho. To my right, Pastor Paula White, head of the faith office. Cardinal Dolan. We thought Doctor Phil would bring an interesting perspective--Doctor Phil. Kelly Shackelford and Doctor Ryan Anderson. Because what we wanted to do was to have a committee of those from the faith-based clergy, for those with PhDs in history, and for lawyers who have practiced religious liberty and won religious liberty cases at the Supreme Court. And these are the folks who will lead to present the report to the President in the spring of 2026.

So, for opening remarks for the three who were not able to be here when our first scheduled hearing was set, because they all have busy schedules, I want to introduce three of those. Eric Metaxas, author Eric Metaxas, you're up first to give your remarks on religious liberty. Please give him a welcome.

Eric Metaxas: You may be seated.

There is nothing more important, nothing more important than religious liberty.

And it is because most of us in this room, and most people in the country, do not understand that, as a fact, that we need to have this Commission.

I look forward to the day when we don't even need to think about a President delivering executive orders to tell us what we can and cannot do, because we already know what we can and cannot do.

But I praise the Lord that we do have a President that understands that and is opening the door.

When I say there's literally nothing more important than religious liberty, you cannot have America--now this is fact; if I had a whiteboard, I can show you--you cannot have America.

You cannot have a self-governing nation without a robust expression of Christian faith among its citizenry. That is not possible.

Our Founders understood that. They all understood it. Every single one.

Don't let anybody tell you. Oh, they were deists. Baloney. Can I say baloney at a religious gathering? Because there are other words I'd like to use.

They all understood that liberty, self-government, freedom cannot exist without a robust expression of Christian faith.

They also knew you cannot legislate Christian faith. And even to dare to do so is no different than saying that everyone in this country has to be an atheist or a particular kind of Muslim.

They said no, liberty must be free for us actually to have liberty, we have to allow religion to be utterly free.

So, freedom in the Founders' model and faith are inextricably intertwined. There's no getting around it. Everyone in America used to understand that, used to know that and be able to talk about it.

We need to get back there. America was on the verge of going away forever because so many had forgotten that. so I praise Jesus for this Commission, for this President and for this nation.

God bless you.

Chairman Patrick: Next up, Reverend Franklin Graham.

Rev. Graham: Understand that everything we say is on the record, so I want to be on the record. I believe in God. Amen. I believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, from heaven to this earth to take our sins, that He died and shed His blood on a cross for our sins, that He was buried in a tomb and sealed in a tomb for our sins. And on the third day, God raised His son to life. Jesus is not dead. He's alive and He's coming back. This is what I believe. Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Well, that's it, folks. Good night. Thank you for being here. About sums up the day. Cardinal Timothy Dolan.

Cardinal Dolan: Thank you sir. Pastor Graham, you just said the Creed, and in our Catholic churches, we usually do the collection right afterwards. What a great way to empty the room. Thank you.

Thank you distinguished colleagues united in defense of our first and most cherished freedom. Thank God for President Trump. And thank God for me for the honor of serving on this distinguished Commission. Thanks be to God that we have a chief executive who takes religious freedom seriously and realistically recognizes that it's under threat today.

Now, I've been thinking, my enthusiasm for serving on this Commission really doesn't come--you might think it would--but it really doesn't come from my role as pastor of the Catholic flock of New York, or from my own Catholic faith - however priceless both of those are to me. It comes because I'm a committed American citizen who strives to practice the biblical virtue of patriotism, who rejoices in the wisdom of our Founders that rights come not from governments, but from God.

That the job of government, that the job of government is to protect our freedoms, not to give them or take them away.

As one who dabbles in American history, I realize that our finest, our most noble moments as a people have been inspired by our faith, our values, our moral fiber, and that our dreariest and scariest episodes come when that freedom of religion is snickered at, considered oppressive, or chipped away. Then, then we're in peril.

To protect and to foster our first and most cherished freedom is thus my duty, my joy, and my honor. Not just as a man of faith, not just as an ordained minister, but as a grateful American who's

convinced that this nation is a light to the world because we each have the freedom to believe and practice our faith.

Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: And as I said here, listen, I think what an extraordinary moment this is in our history, that we actually have a President who wants to put God first in all the things that we do.

Not since our Founders have we had anyone in the history of this nation to occupy the White House and be so bold.

I remember that Doctor *Carson* and I, we spoke on National Prayer Day when this was announced, and we talked about [how] this President invokes the name of Jesus any more than any President I've ever thought. Amen.

So, we are proud, we are proud to serve on this Commission, and we're going to begin now with our morning witnesses.

And once again, we would normally have our witnesses, and then we would ask them questions after they give their testimony, but today we'll take some notes. And after the President speaks and we reset the stage, then we'll come back and ask them questions.

I want you to make them feel comfortable because this is a little intimidating, maybe, as opposed to sitting at a witness table and being further back on the stage, they're going to be here, front and center in front of you and millions watching on television and live streaming.

So, make them feel comfortable. These are outstanding young people that are going to kick off our hearing today.

Our witnesses are Lydia Booth. She'll be escorted by her mom, Jennifer Booth, then Justin Aguilar, and then Valerie Cleveringa, escorted by her father, Colton. They each have compelling stories and they will share those now. So, Lydia, would you welcome us?

Chairman Patrick: Let me, hold on. Let me adjust this for you. Thank you.

Student Perspectives

Miss Lydia Booth, Elementary School Student

Miss Booth: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today.

I was in third grade at a public elementary school in Simpson County, Mississippi, when schools reopened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

That year was hard for everyone. We had to wear face masks all day, keep our distance, and things didn't feel normal.

But I found something that gave me comfort. My favorite face mask. It was black with hot pink letters that had three simple words on it. Jesus loves me. For me, those words meant something really special. As a Christian, I believe that Jesus loves us all and he's always with us, especially when life is scary or confusing.

During that time, everything felt uncertain. But those three simple words reminded me that I wasn't alone. I was deeply loved, and I hope it'd remind others of that too.

At first, I wore it to school without any problems. Other kids were wearing masks with words and logos on them. Students had masks with sports teams, logos and Black Lives Matter logo, to name a few.

But one day in October, my computer lab teacher told me I wasn't allowed to wear my mask because it had words on it. I was really sad and confused. Sad because I loved the reminder that Jesus was with me always, just as the Bible says, but also confused because I didn't know why the school was telling me I couldn't wear it. I'd worn it many times since school had started.

When my mom picked me up from school that day. I told her what happened and his wise moms do. She didn't get angry. She got curious.

That night, and the rest of the week she read every school policy, the school handbook, and school directives on Covid, but she couldn't find anything saying that mask with words weren't allowed. She talked to other parents and even asked some staff.

No one had heard of such a rule, so we thought maybe it was just a misunderstanding and my teacher was confused and my mom said it was okay for me to wear my "Jesus Loves Me" mask again.

But a few days later, I'll never forget what happened right before lunch. A school official pulled me aside and told me to quickly take off my mask before the other kids got to lunch, so that no one would see. I was embarrassed and hurt. School officials made me feel like I'd done something wrong.

When I got in my mom's car that afternoon, I told her that the school told me my mask was against the rules. She assured me that I didn't do anything wrong and that we'd work through this together.

I found out earlier that day the school principal had called my mom to say the student handbook prevented religious or political things on masks at school. But when my mom asked to see the rule in the handbook, the principal couldn't find it.

Later that afternoon, my mom sent an email to the school district asking about the mask policy. The assistant superintendent called her. He said that the rule about no words on mask wasn't in the handbook, but in the district's Covid restart plan, it did prohibit masks with political and religious statements. He then emailed a copy to my mom.

But when my mom compared the docent he sent with the plan on the school district's website, they weren't the same. The sentence about religious statements on mask was nowhere to be found in the Covid restart plan on the school's website. And to my mom's greater shock, she discovered that in the metadata, that the emailed version had been modified right before the assistant superintendent called her.

My mom realized that this man had actually altered the original plan to stop me from wearing a mask that said, "Jesus loves Me."

That's when we know this wasn't just about the mask. The school was violating my rights.

So, with God's direction and the help of some amazing people at Alliance Defending Freedom, me and my family took a stand and filed a lawsuit against the school district.

Thankfully, the school soon agreed to allow me to wear my "Jesus Loves Me" mask again, but it never admitted--but it never admitted it had violated my religious freedom, and it took over two years before the district finally settled the case, agreeing to protect all students' rights to express their faith.

I was only nine years old when this happened, but through it all, I learned something I'll never forget. You're never too young for your voice to matter.

If I had stayed silent, nothing would have changed, but because we spoke up, now other students can wear messages of faith and love without the fear of being silenced.

Isaiah 7:9 says, "[I]f you do not stand firm in faith, then you do not stand at all."

It was intimidating at times facing that harassment, but I've come to know that doing the right thing isn't always easy, and God can use even something as small as this mask to help ensure our amazing country remains free.

Thank you for inviting me today to share my story, and thank you for all that you do to stand for freedom. I'm praying for you and President Trump.

Justin Aguilar

Chairman Patrick: Our next witness is Justin Aguilar. Justin, please come forward.

Mr. Aguilar: Hello, everyone. Good morning.

My name is Justin Aguilar. I'm a public school graduate, and I recently graduated as valedictorian of my high school class.

I never imagined that standing for my faith in Christ would lead me here, but I thank God that it has.

I'm not here to criticize, but to testify, to share my experience in hopes that it encourages you, empowers educators, and builds courage and students to share their faith.

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and I truly believe that. And it's our--and it's in our being.

Our Pledge of Allegiance says that we are one nation under God.

When preparing my high school valedictorian speech, I included a few sentences to express my gratitude to God and His Son Jesus, because He gave me the ability to succeed in my education, and He has carried me through many serious medical hardships, but when I submitted my speech, it was censored.

"Jesus Christ" was crossed out completely. They didn't want me to - they didn't want His name to be on my paper. They just simply crossed His name out. It broke my heart. These weren't just lines on a paper or words that were crossed out, but Jesus is part of who I am.

I was not allowed to mention the name of my friend, the person who means so much to me. This was especially hard because I had strong relationships with the teachers and the administrators, so when I was asked to remove Jesus, it tore my heart. I asked the person, "why are they doing this?"

They said that if I didn't change the speech, they wouldn't allow me to give it. They told me that I couldn't talk about Jesus due to separation of church and state. They also told me that they had another student from a previous year who had similar situation, and that student was also censored. So even though my speech was censored on paper, I didn't, It didn't sit right with me in my heart.

I wanted to give glory to God no matter what, but I also wanted to respect my school administrators and authorities. I wanted to do what was right. I confirmed with the Liberty Council that I wasn't somehow mistaken, and that the First Amendment allowed me to give credit to God at my graduation.

Afterwards, respectfully, I made the decision to move forward trusting God. I resubmitted my speech with everything I wanted to say, including thanking my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The school district never gave me clear confirmation on whether I could deliver my speech, or whether I would get in trouble if I gave it as I originally planned.

I showed up on graduation day, trembling with original speech still in my heart. I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to guide me. As soon as I got in the facilities. I felt tremendous pressure.

The problem was the unknown of what I didn't know. I didn't know what was going to happen. I feared they would, they would let me give my speech, that they wouldn't let me give my speech or not have a copy of it up there on the podium, or that someone would mute my mic, or someone would drastically take me off the stage.

I didn't know if they were going to hate me for this, or what the reaction was going to be. My heart was pounding, my throat was drying up, but God. I knew the Lord was with me because in my weakness he is strong. He gave me courage walking up to that stage and walking up to that stage, it felt like forever.

And I walked up to that podium and gave my speech, including, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has always loved me.

And what's amazing is that the crowd erupted. I felt this huge joy and relief. And at this graduation, with tons of people, with lots of people around. Out of everything that was said that day, nothing had as big of a response as the name of Jesus.

After the speech, something beautiful happened. People weren't divided. They were inspired. People, including other students that I had been praying for, came up to me and said that their hearts were touched and it meant so much to me. People I didn't even know came up to me with tears in their eyes.

And one of my teachers cried and she hugged me, and she told me that she was so proud of me and glad that I didn't change a single thing on my speech.

My principal was in tears. I was in tears. It was a moment that showed the importance of faith in our lives, so to every school teacher, administrator and district leader, you don't have to censor students. You don't have to be afraid of religious speech.

I believe if more teachers and school officials knew what the law actually required, they would feel more confident to reject calls of censorship. I believe many school leaders love and support their students, just like my teachers and my administrators did., but they need accurate information. They need the support to stand with students of faith without fear of being punished themselves.

That's why the support of the President and the support of this Commission means so much, and it matters to protect not just the students, but the staff who want to do what's right.

My relationship with Jesus Christ isn't something I added to my story. It is my story. My identity and Christ defines me, so asking students to erase their faith from their voice is asking them not to be themselves.

To every teacher and administrator, I want you to know that grace and love and truth go hand in hand. You can support students' religious liberty and still honor every student in the room.

So to the President and this Commission, thank you for standing up for the Constitution. Thank you for protecting the First Amendment and for empowering students and educators to live out their faith.

And to any students listening to this, when you're given a platform, whether it's a classroom, a graduation, or a public and government hearing, don't be afraid to thank the one who gave it all to you. You don't need to shout. Just stand and speak and trust that the Lord God will do the rest.

God bless you. Jesus truly loves you and thank you for hearing this testimony. God bless you.

Miss Valerie Cleveringa, Elementary School Student, Michigan

Chairman Patrick: Man, for every university and college out there in America think you ought to make a call to him. Unless you're too woke to do so. He is, that is strong. Any question how he was valedictorian? Man, that was awesome. Our next, let me get my list here - our next witness. That was stunning. Pastor Graham, if you. Reverend Graham, if you need a fill in, you now know who you have available to you. Valerie Cleveringa, you're our next witness. Please come forward. We have a Presidential stool for you.

Miss Cleveringa: Hi. My name is Valerie. Hi. My name is Valerie. Thank you for inviting my family and I here to DC. I'm speaking on behalf of my brother and me. This last spring, our school was doing a talent show. My brother and I loved Christian music, so we decided to pick our favorite songs to sing at the show.

We were given the talent show slips a month before audition. On the slips, we had to let the teachers know where our talent was in the song we were singing. I choose my favorite song, Up and Up by Colin Nixon. My brother chose the song That's Who I Praise by Brandon Lake.

A few days before audition, my mom received a phone call from a principal at our school saying there was an issue with my brother's song. She stated it strongly mentioning God and its violation of the separation of church and state.

She pointed out that the title alone was what caught their eye. They wanted my brother to change his song, but if he changed his song, he would want to choose another Christian song because, because it – no - because that what he loves to sing about.

The teachers stated they would have to go through my song, but it should be okay because it doesn't go into detail like my brother's song choice. The same night, my parents had a phone call with the principal. They wanted to hear from her why she wanted my brother to change his song and what the actual issue was.

The principal stated the song was too Christian and they were worried about what another student would think. The principal also started picking out words in my brother's song like the word slave, she started stating the - she stated they had an issue with that word, but the song says "no longer slave," referring to Moses in the Promised Land in the Bible.

She finally agreed to let my brother try out with the song, but said he would have to change it if he had made it into the talent show. My parents disagreed because there was no there's nothing bad about the lyrics, and he would only have a couple days to learn a different song.

Mind you, this was my brother's first talent show. He was so excited and even emotional when practicing. My parents mentioned to her my song "Up and Up" also mentioning God.

She was unaware and said they would have to revise my song as well. The next day at school, the same teacher that contacted my mom found me and told me that there were issues with my, with our songs because not everyone believes in God.

My brothers stated that the same day the same teacher told him that he had picked a really hard song. He felt pressured to sing something different.

My parents sat down with my brother and me, letting us know what was going on. They asked us how we felt about the situation. Both my brother and I were upset and went on singing our song.

The song “Up and Up” is one of my favorites because when I’m down or things are hard, I know that I can always go to God through prayer.

For my brother, “That’s who I Praise” speaks to him because it talks about the heroes in the Bible and reflects that God always has our back.

Both my parents agreed to and told us, no matter what, don’t back down from our faith. No one should be able to tell us, us how we can or cannot express our faith in a positive manner.

At that point, my parents decided to reach out to First Liberty Institution and fight for our rights to be able to sing our songs. First Liberty sent a letter to explain how the Constitution protects kids like me.

The very next day, the school changed their position and did the right thing. Both my brother and I were able to perform our song at the at the audition without changing the words, and we were both made it into to the talent show.

The school didn’t give us any problems after First Liberty reached out to them. It was fun being able to perform on stage, watching our friends sing along to our song.

One of the coolest parts besides to sing one of my favorite songs is that Colton Dixon made himself a video and sent me words of encouragement. It not only was the awesome surprise, but something I will remember forever. I’m super grateful that God allowed everything to work out.

I’m also grateful that my parents stood up for my brother and me, and that First Liberty helped us. I’m also happy that our school let us sing our original songs.

What I take away from all of this is not only we were able to perform our favorite Christian songs sharing God’s light, but also we were showing others how to stand up for their faith. And thank you for, for your time and listening to our testimony.

Mr. Jeremy Dys, Attorney, First Liberty Institute

Chairman Patrick: If you didn't know before, you now know why the President formed this Commission. This is happening all over the country in every walk of life. Our next witness on our first panel, Jeremy Dys. Jeremy.

Mr. Dys: And I don't need the Presidential stool, I suppose. Well, members of the Commission, thank you for the invitation to address you this morning. In my dozen years of civil rights litigation and the practice that I've had, I've had the privilege, the sincere privilege of representing students just like the ones you've heard from this morning, more of whom you'll hear from this afternoon and their stories.

You hear the many benefits of religious liberty, as well as the burdens wrought upon real people, real children, when religious liberty is denied by school officials.

These students, as you've heard from, joined others like John Rainey, who was told by his principal in Long Island that his attempt to form a religious club at his school was, and I'm quoting, illegal.

Mackenzie Frazier, her teacher, told her that she could not reference John 3:16 as a part of her class assignment called "All About Me."

Giovanni Rubio, in the fifth grade had received a free Bible from his church, and during the free reading time at school, chose to read it, but was told that he could not do so.

And then just last month, Sabrina Stevens, who had to threaten a lawsuit in order to paint a Bible verse on her senior parking space in the parking lot of her New York school.

The list could go on for some length of time. Each of these cases represents students from elementary to high school facing situations the Constitution guaranteed them that they should never have to face.

And rather than uphold these guarantees, too often school districts weaponize the Establishment Clause against them. And instead of recognizing the demands of the Equal Access Act, that religious students be given the opportunity to form religious clubs in the same way that secular clubs may meet, school officials labeled our clients as lawbreakers.

Even though the First Amendment guarantees the right of parents to direct their children's education and religious upbringing without government interference, school officials far too often place obstacles in the way of parents having to say, having a say in such things after they drop them off in the school drop off line.

For instance, in Ohio, some school districts grudgingly complied with state law that allows parents to send their children off campus to receive religious education during the school day.

This is an accommodation that the Supreme Court of the United States upheld in 1952, and they said that it reflects, quote, “the best of our traditions” when the school accommodates parents to have their children receive religious instruction.

But some school districts mandated by state law to allow this vary release time, religious instruction simply banned such programs from sending back handouts with Bibles with the students to the, to the school when they resumed their school day.

Yet, federal law requires that public schools certify compliance with the Constitution’s guarantees on matters of religious liberty in order to receive federal funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Well, these are the stories. Let me turn from stories to specific proposals that this Commission might consider to further strengthen this nation’s commitment to religious liberty.

First of all, this Commission should recommend that the federal government publicly report which states are compliant in the protection of religious liberty at school and, importantly, which ones are not. Even through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, even though it requires state and local educational agencies to certify compliance with the Constitution’s guarantees, including religious liberty, within our public schools, the public has no transparent means by which they can know for certain who is and who is not compliant, and, therefore, who is and who is not entitled to their taxpayer dollars under the ESEA.

A very simple website created by the government reporting who has or who has not so certified, would give much confidence to parents and students across the country knowing that their rights will be respected.

Secondly, I would encourage you and encourage the rest of the federal government to extend the protections of the Equal Access Act to elementary students and tie compliance with it to funding under the ESEA.

The Equal Access Act has prevented many school districts from denying student religious clubs, but only for those clubs for students, typically between the grades of six and twelve.

Elementary students like Valerie, and others like those that you’ll hear from today, they’re equally entitled to the law’s protections, and yet are specifically excluded under the Equal Access Act, and state and local educational agencies should be required to certify that they have complied and will comply with the Equal Access Act in order to receive taxpayer funding.

The American taxpayer should not be required to fund schools that welcome secular clubs on campus, but are unwilling to allow students of any age to form clubs related to their faith tradition.

Third, and finally, celebrate, provide clear guidance on and rigorously enforce the protections regained in such cases as *Kennedy vs. Bremerton*. *Carson vs. Macon*, and most recently, *Mahmood*

vs. Taylor, among many other important decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States that protect religious liberty.

Each of these cases restored rights. Hear me again to say restored rights to students, teachers and parents that were long laid aside under past erroneous, and as we now understand, damaging interpretations of the Constitution.

These cases overturned harmful precedents that caused the denial of the protections of rights flowing from the First Amendment, and also led to students, parents and teachers being ridiculed, singled out and ostracized for their religious convictions.

The promise of our Constitution applies to the students of our nation's public schools at every level. That, and I'm quoting again from the Supreme Court that Charter of Rights, that is, the Constitution extends respectfully to parents whose, whose right and privilege it is to direct the religious upbringing of their children, protecting and, where necessary, restoring those rights should be the goal of this Commission.

As was said many years ago by the Supreme Court of the United States, the students of our nation's public schools do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate. Neither are our nation's schools to be enclaves of totalitarianism.

Rather as another court, as another court has said, under the Constitution, school officials may not confine speech, religious speech to whispers or banish it to broom closets. For if it did, and again, quoting from that same court, the exercise of one's religion would not be free at all.

Thank you for my opportunity to address you. After we've had some other speakers and perhaps even some lunch, I'm happy to take your questions.

Chairman Patrick: I've often had parents say to me, it's very confusing, very difficult for my children. I take them to Bible class or Sunday school or church with us on Sunday, and then they have to forget all about it when they show up at the schoolhouse door the next day. As we await the President's arrival very shortly, I want to bring back Cardinal Dolan. He was unable to make our first hearing because his, the train from New York broke down, and he called and said, "gosh, I wanted to tell a story in my remarks about his experience about religious liberty at the conclave," when he went to select the new pope, and I wanted him to come forward and share that story.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. Thanks for remembering that. Right, so the first meeting I, I couldn't make because the Amtrak was three hours late. It was canceled. Last night, we were about forty-five minutes late.

I'm going to ask the President if instead of being on this Commission, he could put me on the National Transportation Board, because this would.

So thanks for remembering, Lieutenant governor. I had told him when, I when I called with my regrets at being unable to make the meeting, that I had just returned from the conclave to elect

Pope Leo, and obviously we were there for thirty-one days between the death of Pope Francis and the installation of Pope Leo and we cardinals, the cardinals from around the world spend a lot of time together - only, what, about thirty hours together in the actual conclave, locked in, which is what conclave means in the Sistine Chapel.

But before that, for two weeks in what's called the congregation meetings, and we don't have to keep those quiet, so I can talk about this.

What I shared with the chairman is the number of my brother Cardinals from all over the world who came up to me, and I presume other of the American cardinals, to thank us for our strong defense of religious liberty. I was fascinated by that and asked them why.

And they said, well, because you in the United States serve as a beacon for the rest of us. So many, and this gives us, this gives us an added sense of responsibility.

We're not doing this in a self-serving way. We're doing this as an extraordinarily solicitous and benevolent way to help our others, to help others, because they look to us for the protection of religious liberty. They look to us as a nation that's extraordinarily democratic, but yet admits that we couldn't be that, unless we had, we were one nation under God.

They said to me, you must realize - and so these are cardinals from well, I'm not going to say it because they could get in trouble, that's how somber it is.

But you would know the nations where there's overt persecution. You'd also know the nations where there's perhaps not legal persecution, but cultural, where the forces of, of secularism on steroids so snicker and sideline religion that it has no access to any of cultures' more noble enterprises where they're just afraid to bring the religious values.

But these cardinals would tell me, these thugs that run our nation want to be the only dominant force. They want to be the Dominus, the Lord. They want to dominate.

Now, we've been through that in the Roman Empire, right? And they said so, they will immediately, first and foremost, go after religious freedom, because people of conscience and people of moral conviction and people of, of muscular religious faith, these are the ones that have the freedom and the integrity to speak out, and these are the ones that must be silenced.

So they will immediately work to curtail religious freedom. We saw that in the Soviet Union, did we not? And we see it today whenever we have theocracies or totalitarian regimes because they want total, total, total control of their people, not, not just their wallets, not just their brawn, not just their muscles, but their heart and their soul. And we say no. We say no.

There's only one. There's only one who is our God. There's only one who is the Lord, and nobody else has absolute dominion.

And if we give up on that freedom, we've lost it all, and I was bolstered that my brother Cardinals said, go home and keep at it. Thanks for letting me share that.

Attorney General Pamela Bondi

Chairman Patrick: We're going to take a brief break as the President arrives, and I believe the Secret Service wish you to keep your seats. I believe that's the, so just kind of sit there and we'll advise you very shortly. So we'll take a brief break, gentlemen and ladies.

Attorney General Bondi: Thank you, and thank you, Lieutenant Governor Patrick. Our Founders believed every individual has the right to worship freely without fear of their own government. No one knows this better than President Trump. Under his leadership, we have dropped forsake cases against pro-life Christians, stopped the FBI from spying on Catholics, launched multiple investigations into antisemitism in schools, and we are aggressively prosecuting vicious crimes against Jewish Americans. President Trump is fighting each day for our parents, our students, and every American's right to live out their faith. There is no greater defender of the First Amendment than the President, and there is no greater President than Donald Trump. We all thank President Trump for protecting the God given rights of every American, and it is my great honor to introduce to you the 45th and the 47th President of the United States of America, Donald Trump.

President Donald J. Trump

President Trump: Well, thank you very much. Thank you very much. I said, we'll have to cut Lee Greenwood a little bit short. How good is, how good is he, right? He's been with us right from the beginning, and I wanted to stand and listen to the entire song but people would have said, "look at the ego of that guy. He just wouldn't stop. He just stood there and listened to the applause."

But I appreciate it very much, and I want to thank you for doing an incredible job, Pam Bondi, the attorney general, has been unbelievable. Incredible job. Thank you. Thank you. Amazing.

And thank you to all of the faith leaders, pastors and patriots who have come to the Museum of the Bible for this historic meeting of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty. These are incredible people, and everybody wanted to be on this Commission, and I made a couple of people unhappy, maybe even enemies for life. I don't know, but they all wanted to be on the Commission.

But we picked the right ones, and they've done a really a profound, an amazing job. But America was founded on faith, as we know, and I've been saying it for a long time, and when faith gets weaker, our country seems to get weaker. When faith gets stronger, as it is right now, we're having a very good period of time.

After some rough years, good things happen for our country. It's amazing the way it seems to work that way. And under the Trump administration, we're defending our rights and restoring our identity as a nation under God. We are one nation under God, and we always will be.

The need for this Commission has never been more clear than it was last week, when the ineffectual senator from Virginia, man named Tim Kaine, stated that the notion "our rights come from our Creator" is, quote, "extremely troubling to him," very troubling. Isn't it troubling? Isn't it terrible, though, how he would say something like that and advocated really by a totalitarian regime. This is what they say.

But as everyone in this room understands, it is tyrants who are denying our rights and the rights that come from God, and it's this Declaration of Independence that proclaims we're endowed by our Creator with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The Senator from Virginia should be ashamed of himself for many things, for many things - for things even beyond that. But in his own way, nothing is more important than those words. It was terrible words.

As President, I will always defend our nation's glorious heritage, and we will protect the Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding, and we will protect them with vigor.

We have to bring back religion in America, bring it back stronger than ever before as our country grows stronger and stronger. Our country is now the hottest nation anywhere in the world. One year ago, our country was dead.

And I say it, one year ago our country was dead. We had leaders from all over the world that talked to me. They'd say "your country is in trouble."

And I just left the Middle East, king of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, a lot of the big countries. Then I was with the heads of NATO, the NATO nations, all of them. Everyone said essentially the same thing that a year ago your country was dead and now you have the hottest country anywhere in the world. It's true. It's true in every way.

But to have a great nation, you have to have religion. I believe that so strongly. That has to be something after we go through all of this, and that something is God. We go through all of this for a reason. It's not easy, believe me, but I want to thank the Commission's chairman, Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. He's been the chairman of my Texas campaign from day one.

He's been the chairman of my Texas campaign, and we went through six primaries, and we went through everything that we went through, and we won them all. We won everything, including three elections, got the most votes in the history of Texas three times. Can you believe that? That's pretty good. I heard that the other day. I said, "I like that."

But I want to thank you, Dan, you've done a great job and very instrumental in the creation of what we're doing today, as well as a very special friend of mine, Doctor **Ben Carson**, so special that he's being honored. He's being honored in a couple of weeks, and I was absolutely not here.

It was a very important mission for the country. And because I usually take missions only for the country, but this was for the country. And I said, I can't do that one. I'm going to go back. I'm going to be with **Ben Carson** at Mount Vernon, I believe it's going to be. Pretty good place, pretty good location, right, Ben?

But he's been my friend from the beginning. Right from the beginning. Shall I tell them the story about what you said to me, Ben? The famous words? He was a very tough opponent. We were fighting it out, and we had actually eighteen candidates, including me.

And Ben came up to me right after the first debate. He said, "you know, you're going to win, don't you?" And I said, "no, I don't know that. I think I'm going to win, but I don't know it."

The eighteen people and I had never done it before. They had all done it. They were all governors and senators, talented people.

He said, "no, you're going to win it because God wants you to win it." Right? Yeah? But that didn't stop him. We went through.

I said, when is this guy going to quit? You know, he gave, he gave me these words of beauty. Then he goes for weeks and weeks. He was tough. He was a tough one, but we love Ben. Ben's special and we appreciate it. Thank you Ben.

Thanks also to the Commission members, including Secretary Scott Turner, Pastor Paula White, who's been with me from very beginning, right? Pastor Franklin Graham, great great gentleman, great gentleman. Thank you, Franklin.

A man I've watched for years on television, but you're not supposed to admit it. You know, it's like with me, people don't like to admit it, but we all watch Phil McGraw. Doctor Phil, Doctor Phil. Thank you. Phil, great guy.

He came out early for me. He did a piece on me before the election that was different than any interview I've ever done. He asked me the most personal questions. I said, this guy's really getting personal, but everybody that saw it loved it so thank you. Thank you very much.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, highly respected man. It's great. You come from New York. He was in his own right the king. He was great, and we worked together in the first administration so much and going through that horrible epidemic that we went through.

A couple of epidemics, we had to go through, a couple of really bad ones, but we worked together and I helped, I helped financially with your church and your schools keeping your schools going, and it was an honor to do so.

Bishop Robert Barron. Bishop, thank you very much. Appreciate it. Great job you've done. A man I watch on television a lot. He doesn't believe it, and I do.

Eric Metaxas. Where is Eric? Eric, I do watch. He said, "you really don't." I said, "I really do." I said, "you have to have more confidence in this. Your show is excellent." And he's a great guy and he wants me to call it the super Centennial. He said, super centennial. And I think we're going to do that. Let's change it. I really like that idea because we call it the 250 Centennial, but it's really not. It's really just below the try, right? So we're going to call it Super Centennial then. Okay? Let's do that. Will you please make the changes. All of my people that are all over the room, please make that change.

A wonderful person who I've known for a long time, Kelly Shackelford. Kelly, thank you. Thank you very much. Great job.

Ryan Anderson. Ryan. Thank you. Congratulations.

Carrie Boler and Allison ho. Carrie. Two great people.

And we're also joined by the chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, Ralph Reed. Where's Ralph? Ralph, you helped so much. You know, Ralph, I think, hit more doorbells than anybody else I know, millions and millions. What was the number, Ralph? Ten million. Ten million. And it's true. You know, somebody else would say, well, was it really? And it was. People were saying he was all over the place. Thank you very much, Ralph, I appreciate it. We'll never forget it. Thank you.

Let me also thank everyone at the Museum of the Bible, including Steve and Jackie Greene. The job they've done is just incredible. It's, I want to say their entire family is here. I want them to all hear it, but they founded this beautiful museum to honor the most widely read book in history, and the job they've done is amazing.

I ask, "which museum does the best?" You know, I always like to find that out, and numerous times they're saying the Museum of the Bible, that more people come here than anyone else. You probably won't read that in the newspapers or the media, but this is an amazing place and it does tremendously well, so respected.

And they, they built it up and it was a labor of love. Well, it's nice that he's rich as hell too. It always helps. Where are you? Where are you guys? Where are they? Yeah, look at that. They don't even get good location okay.

See, if I did the Museum of the Bible, it wouldn't be as successful, but I'd be sitting right here. No, I'd be sitting up here.

You've done a great job. Everybody's talking about it. It's, I got a little involved with museums, you know, because I had a little problem with the Smithsonian. We like a little more positivity. It was all about all the bad things in our country. I said, what about the good things we've done? So I got a little involved. I got a little involved with that.

And they're making honestly, they're making changes. You know, they were also told what to do by people that came before me, in all fairness., but they're making changes. Big changes are being made at the Smithsonian.

But I just want to thank the Greene family, because what you've done here is incredible. Thank you very much.

For thousands of years, the Bible has shaped civilization, ethics, art and literature, and it's brought hope, healing and transformation to untold millions and millions of lives. The Bible is also an important part of the American story. That's why I'm delighted to announce that just moments ago, I have personally delivered the Trump Family Bible given to me by my mother. I remember the time she gave it to me, but it was used in both my inaugurations and also a display at the museum, and I guess it will now be displayed right in the heart of our nation's capital, right here and it's an honor. That's an honor.

We're here this morning to discuss the grave threats to religious liberty in American schools, and you know what's going on. We all know what's going on. But I will tell you, a lot of progress has been made in the last eight months. Tremendous progress, more than I thought we could make in so many ways.

Not only that, the woke agenda is practically gone. It's deep seated. We have to make sure it's out. It's very bad. It's like a weed. You think you killed it, and then it starts growing again, so we have to be careful. But it's very, very different than it was.

You look at West Point how proud they are of their heritage. They did something this week which I thought was appropriate. Some of you know what that is. Does anybody know what that is? Yeah, I like it. I like it. Oh look at who we have over here. We have your associate, Pam. Leo 2.0. Well. We have Leo here. We have, is he doing a good job, Pam? He's great. He's a DOJ. He's a great man. He's a great friend of mine for a long time.

I'm glad I got to see him. I would have been in big trouble, Pam, if I didn't see him. But thank you, Leo, very much. I appreciate it.

For most of our country's history, the Bible was found in every classroom in the nation. Yet in many schools today, students are instead indoctrinated with anti-religious propaganda, and some are even punished for their religious beliefs and very, very strongly punished. It's ridiculous.

Joining us this morning is Hannah Allen from Honey Grove, Texas. A few years ago, Hannah organized a group of her classmates to pray for an injured peer. The school principal declared that Hannah's generous act of love was prohibited from taking place in front of the other students, didn't like it. The principal didn't like it. Can you imagine?

But Hannah very strongly stood her ground, and she won. And, Hannah, I just want to thank you for letting the light of your faith shine for all of those to see. We really appreciate it. And where is Hannah? Is Hannah here someplace? I think so. Hannah, stand up please. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you, Hannah. I know what you went through. I know what you went through. It's great. Appreciate it.

To support students like Hannah, I'm pleased to announce this morning that the Department of Education will soon issue new guidance protecting the right to prayer in our public schools, and this total protection.

Thank you, Hannah. Great job. See what you did. Hannah. Who knew? Who knew that was going to happen, right? Thank you darling.

Also with us is twelve year old Shea Encinas from California. Last year in fifth grade, Shea was forced to read a book to a kindergarten student promoting a message of radical gender ideology that is contrary to his religious beliefs and ours. I'd like to have Shea come up and tell the story. It's an amazing story. Shea, please come up.

I love your tie. I like that top. It's a great shirt. There you go, buddy.

Thank you again, Mr. President. Hi, I'm Shane Encinas. I've been a Christian my whole life, and Jesus means everything to me. When I was in fifth grade, my school forced me to teach my kindergarten buddy about changing his gender using a book called *My Shadow Is Pink*. The book said you can choose your gender based on feelings instead of how God made us. I knew this was not right, but I was afraid of getting in trouble. After my family spoke up, the school treated us badly and kids started bullying me and my brother because of our faith and the school did nothing to stop it. It hurt a lot, but I kept trusting God.

I believe kids like me should be able to live our faith at school without being forced to go against what we believe. I hope no other family has to go through what mine did. Thank you.

Thank you Shea. Great job. That was delivered well, wasn't it? On day one of my administration, I signed an executive order to slash federal funding for any school that pushes transgender insanity on our youth. We also banned the chemical and surgical mutilation of our children. Thank you.

We got men out of women's sports. How tough was that? How could, but could you imagine? Seriously, I'm just thinking to myself, transgender for everybody, men playing in women's sports, all of the different things we talk about, it's insane.

And if you were here 15, 20 years ago and if somebody made a speech about transgender for everyone, I always say trans because for everyone, transgender, we have some states that actually can force it upon you without the parents' notification or approval. It's not even believable.

But can you imagine men playing in women's sports? So you're up fifteen years ago, I guess probably ten years ago, but fifteen years ago, and somebody said, "we will not allow men to play in women's sports." People would look at the person and say, "what's he talking? Is he crazy?" It happened. And not only that, the Democrats don't want to give it up.

I watched the congressmen fighting like crazy this weekend for men having the right to play in women's sports, and they don't understand, but I don't want to really fight them on that. I let them. I tell all the Republicans, let them go, let them go. Just, just bring it up about a week before the election because you don't want to talk them out of it.

They say it's an 80-20 issue. I say it's I say, Dan, it's a 97 to 3 issue, okay. And transgender is about the same. It's crazy. It's sort of a crazy thing. It's a world gone wrong, just a world gone wrong.

And I made the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders. You're going to hate this, male and female. You're going to hate.

And we got rid of a very sinister thing, the Johnson amendment, so that pastors can speak the truth that's in their hearts.

You know, I'll tell you, I was in a board room early on. Paula, was there. A couple of people in the room were there, but we had about fifty pastors, some rabbis. We had people from a few different religions, and I was just running. I'd never done it before, so it was very early in the campaign. It was in early 2016, and Trump Tower was sixty eight stories up in the air, a beautiful boardroom and places loaded up with these people, and they were all excited.

And then at the end, I said, "I'd love to have your support," and the room went dead silent. Do you remember? It's like I said, "what happened? I know you like me. What happened?"

Well, would like to talk to you about it later anyway. I said, "all right, but if we could leave and we'll have another meeting, maybe, but I would love to have your support." And there was, again, no answer. And I said, well, we'll figure this out, and I went to Paula and some of the others after,

and I said, “could I ask you, I know when I’m doing well, when I’m doing poorly, and I was doing really well. And then when I asked for support, it was like stone cold silence.”

They said, we have something called the Johnson Amendment that if a pastor or minister or rabbi or imam or anybody says anything about politics, you can lose your tax exempt status. I said, “you got to be kidding.” So that’s what happened and they were petrified of it. Remember that? Nobody even wanted to talk about it. They were absolutely, they became a different group of people.

And I pledged to them at the next meeting, we had another meeting a couple of weeks later with a similar group of people, and I pledged to them that if I win, we’re going to get rid of the Johnson Amendment.

This was Lyndon Johnson who had a tremendous fight with a minister from, I believe it was Houston, Houston or Dallas, and they didn’t like each other. And Lyndon Johnson was a very powerful President. He had good power, good strength, good, he ended up being very weakened by the position, but he had tremendous power.

He was a big dealmaker, and he got that done, which is pretty amazing that he could get that done. Everybody fought him, but he got it done. He pushed it through, pushed it through Congress where you lose your tax exempt status if you even utter a word about politics, and that was amazing when I heard that. That, I never heard of that before.

And I said, we’re going to get rid of it and we got rid of it, you have got, because you’re the people we want to hear from. We want to hear from you. I don’t want to hear from a lot of people. I hear from too many people.

You’re the people we respect. Franklin is incredible. All of the people that are up here, I want to hear from these people, and they come from a different place than me. I come from a business place where there’s a lot of rough people, bad people, not really religious people. There are some, but you’re the people that I want to hear from. That’s why we go to church on Sundays, or we go to wherever we are to, to listen to people of faith.

And it was horrible, I said, you mean when I heard that, and I said to the other people, that means that you should be the most powerful people on earth in a sense, and yet you have less power. And I pointed down to Fifth Avenue, which was stories below, and I said, “that means that anybody on Fifth Avenue, in theory, has more power than you do. And that’s not the way it’s supposed to be. It’s supposed to be the opposite. We have to give you voices back, and I’ve given you voices back.” And that’s one of the reasons that we see upticks now, I think, in religion, so it’s very important, right?

Remember that moment when I said, “I’d love to have your support, ladies and gentlemen” and it was like dead silence. I said, “there’s something going on,” and we figured it out. We did something about it, so thank you. Thank you very much to Paula White too. Thank you.

But upon taking office, I also ended the weaponization of law enforcement against religious believers and pardoned the pro-life activists thrown in jail by Joe Biden for saying prayer.

And you know, people don't realize about the Biden administration. It was a very mean administration. He's a mean guy, actually, not a smart guy, never was, but he was a mean guy. No, he was a mean guy. And he knew enough about what was going on. He wasn't like some of the people that surrounded him on the resolute, the beautiful, resolute desk in the Oval Office. They were stone cold, mean.

But Joe Biden and the Biden, they were mean people. What they did to people, what they did to J 6th, what they did to so many people. They were mean people. These were really radical, horrible people, and he wasn't that way twenty years ago.

He was never the, the brightest bulb in the ceiling, but he was, he was a man who wasn't overly mean that I saw. But boy, he became really mean and his administration was one of the meanest we've ever had. And that's why they're out of here. and people, they, they're having a hard time getting jobs. And that's the way it should be because they are. They were bad.

They did tremendous disservice to this country, including allowing million people into from jails, from prisons, from mental institutions, drug dealers all over the world. They were entered our country from jails. The prison population of Venezuela was emptied out into our country, and that's what we're doing now.

I spent so much of our time, Tom Homan and the, the people that have worked on this so, so hard, you know, Kristi Noem, all of them, they've worked on it so hard. It's just it's like an unforced error and to allow people into our country who are truly, there are evil people. We're all people of religion, but there are evil people, and we have to confront that.

I just give my love and hope to the family of the young woman who was stabbed this morning or last night in Charlotte by a madman. A lunatic just got up and started, it's right on a tape. Not, not really watchable because it's so horrible, but just viciously stabbed. She's just sitting there. So there are evil people. We have to be able to handle that. If we don't handle that, we don't have a country.

And I created the first ever Department of Justice task force to eradicate anti-Christian bias. And for those people that are a little bit naive or not well read, there is a tremendous anti-Christian bias. We don't hear about it. We don't think about it. You hear about anti-Semitic, but you don't hear about anti-Christian. Now you have a strong anti-Christian bias, but we're ending that rapidly. I will tell you, it's a whole, we're in a much different world today than we were one year ago. This is like a different place.

And to support parents' rights, we're fighting, as you know, for school choice, which most people want, most people want it. I'll tell you, Dan was responsible for getting it along with the governor of Texas. They got it in Texas and we helped you a little bit. They needed about twenty votes from

the legislature. He said, "could you make a phone call," to the whoever they were, the legislators who I like a lot, but they were about twenty votes short and they have been for about ten years. I said, "all right, let's give it a shot."

So I gave a big talk to the, who are they? Senators or House members?

They were House members, but you also helped us defeat about fifteen anti school choice people.

That's right. We defeated a lot of anti school choice, but anyway he got it done. So congratulations, that was a big accomplishment.

But as part of our tax cuts we've created a massive tax credit for school choice scholarships so that you can send your child to a school that shares your values, and you get tax credits and all sorts of good things happening.

And I'm also taking action against anti-Semitic and anti-Christian bias in our institutions of higher learning. You've been watching that play out. They're making very substantial settlements, and Leo is involved and Pam Bondi's involved. We've launched.

You know, we're getting hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements. Pam and Leo called me up, "sir, you can do better than that." I said, "what am I going to do?" I'm going to get one where he really likes it, but he always says, everyone else says, "that's amazing," except for Leo. He says, "sir, you could have gotten more." Oh, good. Thanks, Leo, but we've launched sweeping civil rights and title nine investigations into more than colleges going on currently, and universities to stop their violations of civil liberties and First Amendment freedoms.

And, you know, we're involved very much in Harvard. That's one that people seem to be reading about more than others. We have many going. And other than having a radical left judge, you have a very radical left judge. But, you know, the appellate courts have been really good to us. So you go before some of these judges, no matter how good a case you have, you can't win. But we've had a lot of them, but we've done very well in the appellate at the appellate level.

And the case of Harvard, we have an absolute radical left. Judge. Disgraceful, should not even be there. But we have we're doing very well with Harvard, and we're doing very well with all of them. And where we don't win at the lower courts, which sometimes we do some in some states, we get a very fair shake. In other states it's not even possible. But we've done very well at the appellate level and at the United States Supreme Court.

But this includes an unprecedented \$200 million payment from Columbia University. Columbia paid us \$200 million, essentially, in fines and penalties, but many more settlements are soon to follow, and they're going to be behaving because they understand we're coming back. They would not let you have your voice. They wouldn't let the people in this room, any of them have the voice, because that's not the voice they wanted to hear from. They wanted to hear from a very sinister voice, and we're not going to allow that.

In recent years, we've seen far too many violent attacks perpetrated against Americans of faith, beautiful Americans of faith, including in our schools and places of worship. And you know about it more than I do. T

Two weeks ago in Minneapolis, a demonic killer shot people and murdered the two precious children at a Catholic school. Can you believe that? Hard to believe. And time goes by and people say, oh, I sort of remember it, but I remember it. I'll always remember it. What a horrible thing, too many. Happens too much. Our hearts are shattered for the families of those beautiful children. And I've made clear that Attorney General Pam Bondi is working really hard, that we must get answers about the causes of these repeated attacks and we're working very, very hard on that.

The Trump administration will have no tolerance for terrorism or political violence, and that includes hate crimes against Christians, Jews, or anybody else. We're not going to allow it.

And there was also a horrible killing recently in Charlotte where I talked about and so many others, and we will, we're going to get to the end of it. And, you know, when you have horrible killings, you have to take horrible actions, and the actions that we take are nothing.

We, this cashless bail started a wave in our country where a killer kills somebody and is out on the street by the afternoon in, in many cases going out and killing again, cashless bail. And you try and reason with people like in Chicago with the governor and the mayor. You try and reason with them and it's like you're talking to a wall.

It's just doesn't, I assume it's just a political ideology. They're not stupid people. It must be an ideology that's just buried in their head, and you can't do a damn thing about it and we'd love to go into Chicago and straighten it out.

You know, Washington, D.C. you'll be happy to know, is a free and safe zone. It's so safe right now. It was, it was one of the most dangerous. Can you believe it?

It's so, you know, you see the beautiful buildings, but we're going to also do an upgrade because a lot of the beautiful buildings have a little graffiti on them. They have roads that aren't proper. They have medians that are bad and falling down into the road, the dividers. We have things we have to take care of and beautify. We want to beautify it. Very little work will be done. I'm very good at that. That's what I really did the best in life, probably.

I said, "was I a better builder or politician?" They said, "I think you were a better builder, sir." I said I didn't know if I was happy about that or not.

But I was a really good builder and I'll fix this place up for peanuts. I'll fix it up. We'll fix we'll put in new dividers, all the evidence. They're all rotted, rusting and falling down on the road. Potholes all over the place. We're going to have this place looking beautiful within months.

Even the little white tiles in the tunnels. You know, you go through the tunnels and there's little white tiles. They've been up for about sixty years. And like, there's pieces missing and you can't

match them. Believe me, you can't. You try and match them. It never works. You can't. They've been up sixty years. You don't get the same match no matter what you do, but we'll take all those tiles off and you're going to have beautiful white tiled tunnels again.

And everything's going to be really the way it should be because when foreign leaders come, you know, I had to take down the tents. We had over fifty-eight tent cities that we took down right in the middle of our parks, right next to our great buildings.

Supreme Court, you'd have a tent city right there, and nobody would ever tell them to, to do it. We had a blue tent right on Lafayette, and they seem to have a permit. And one of the fake news media was asking me the other day, "what about the blue tent?" What blue tent? Because all it does, somehow these people were very well connected with the communist cause.

And I said, "there's a tent up there? Really?" Yeah, and he was a friendly reporter for a change. He said, "it's terrible that the tent." I said, "I didn't know that, I'm surprised."

And I checked and there was and we got it down very quickly. It's down. It's down, wasn't easy. People chained themselves to a tree and this and that, but that's okay. They can chain themselves if they want. That was a tough one. That's been there for years. It's been there for many years. We took it down, came down very quickly, Pam.

So I hope Attorney General Bondi will be looking into some of these things, and I really know that some of them, she is, she's, she's done such an incredible job. You know, she's got a lot of pressure on her not to do these things by a certain group of people that I guess don't love our country, or there's some ideology that they're just indoctrinated with.

But she's going to do a fantastic job, and we're waiting for a call from Chicago. We'll fix Chicago. And again, D.C. is right now so safe you can go out. Friends of mine called, one in particular. He's been in in DC for a long time, and he said, "I haven't gone out in four years for dinner with my wife."

The restaurants were all closing because people were afraid. Even if they were in the restaurant, it didn't matter. They were held up. You know, guys would walk in with guns into a restaurant and that's over. It's not happening. It's now safe.

And this man said, "I've gone out to dinner in the last week and a half, four times, and I am so safe. My wife could meet me at the restaurant. She could walk by herself. There's zero threat." The National Guard, working with the police, working with the mayor.

The mayor has, you know, that's not her ideology and now I think it maybe is her ideology. She's taking a lot of heat, too, from the radical left. You know, they don't like that she's allowing it. But, look, she's going to either allow it or we'll just do it because, you know, it's just. She understands it. Now she understands that.

But I can tell you, the people of D.C. are thrilled. I have never had so many people. The other day I had a big scrum in front of me of the press, and I said, “you know, everybody here or many of you have been mugged, right?” And they’re all going like, and these aren’t people necessarily on our side. They’re all going, “yes, yes, yes.” What about you? “Yes. It’s true. I was a couple of times,” every one of them. It’s crazy. Not going to happen anymore.

So right now we went from a one of the most in some people say the worst, the most violent city. Can you imagine our capital being the most violent city? But it was it was really bad, into a totally safe zone. It’s called the safe zone city. There’s no crime.

They said crime is down 87%. I said no, no, no, it’s more than 87%. Virtually nothing, and, and much lesser things, things that take place in the home they call crime, you know, they’ll do anything they can to find something. If a man has a little fight with the wife, they say this was a crime. See? So now I can’t claim 100%.

But we are we are a safe city. You can walk to a restaurant. You can walk to the White House, if you work there You can walk to the Capitol, and even the Democrats say, I can’t believe it, but they don’t want to admit it. But I can’t believe it.

We could do the same thing in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles. We did it. We saved, we saved Los Angeles. We saved Los Angeles. Dan, you know that. Los Angeles was a mess.

If we didn’t send our troops in, Gavin New-scum would have had a real problem. We sent our troops, the head police officer, the top person, said, “we could have never done this alone.” We sent our troops right in at the beginning and we killed it. And it was nasty, but we killed it immediately, immediately.

And I don’t know why Chicago isn’t calling us, saying, “please give us help.” When you have over just a short period of time, murders and hundreds of people shot, and then you have a governor that stands up and says how crime is just fine. It’s, it’s really crazy. But we’re bringing back law and order to our country.

And I began my remarks today by noting that the reverence for our Creator, I mean, we, we have reverence for our creator, and it’s inscribed into our Declaration of Independence, a copy of which I have very proudly hanging in the Oval Office. An original copy, very old, beautiful copy.

Next year we will celebrate 250 years since that declaration was signed as part of the grand, Well, this is really a commemoration, like I think we’re going to do. We’re going to try and do a commemoration like nobody’s ever seen before. But we’ve invited America’s great faith communities to pray for our nation and for our people and for peace in the world, and it’s going to be an amazing, it’s going to be an amazing time. We’re going to have an amazing time.

We have the Olympics, we have the World Cup, and we have 250, okay, the super centennial, as our man would say. But and we’re going to, it’s going to be, it’s going to be amazing. It’s going to be maybe bigger than the both of those events.

You know, when I was President I got, I got the World Cup and I got the Olympics, I got I got them to choose us, Los Angeles, and I was very proud of it. The only problem was I wasn't going to be President because I would have served out my time. And then you had some very bad people who rigged an election, and look what happened. I end up getting the Olympics, the World Cup and 250. It's amazing the way God works, isn't it? It's amazing. Isn't it amazing the way God works?

That's true. I got the Olympics, you know, because I'm a little bit of a selfish person, I guess. I said, you know, I got the Olympics and Obama would not call. I'll never forget the head of the Olympic Committee called, and the mayor of Los Angeles called me. And he said, "sir, the President will not talk to them." You know why? Because he traveled to Geneva or wherever to make the presentation, and he came in fourth.

Now, a President shouldn't do that. A President should say, I will do that. I will make that journey which has never been made before. But if I make that journey, you have to pick me. He didn't do that. That's why we had a country that was going to hell, because he didn't do a lot of things like that.

So he ended up sitting there and they announced that we're fourth. We were like almost last. And so he didn't like the Olympic Committee too much, so he refused to talk to him. So I get a call from the mayor of Los Angeles who said, please, sir, would you call? We're ready to get it. But and I spoke to a gentleman and I believe it was Geneva, whatever, wherever they are. And I couldn't get him off the phone. He was so dying for love. He finally got, he finally got something.

Anyway, and he agreed that the Olympics would come to the United States, and I was so proud of it. And then I realized even then I said, I'm not going to be the President. And then the World Cup, we got the World Cup. I did that one too, with Gianni and got the World Cup. And I said, I can't believe it. Can you hold it a little sooner, sir? It's all given out, all these different places. So I wasn't going to get that either. And now I got them both.

And I can't say that I created 250. That one is, that one we have. I'd like to say I created 250 years. I can't say that, but we are going to create a great party and a great celebration, and I'd like to ask a very good friend of mine, Secretary Scott Turner, to come up and say a few words about some of the things we're doing. And, Scott, please take it away.

Well good morning. Good morning. So grateful to be here. What an honor it is to stand with this Commission and with our President. Y'all, we're in the nation's capital. We're at the Museum of the Bible. We're together, and we're talking about faith. Did anybody else pick up on that? I wouldn't want to be anywhere else but right here, so thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to serve under your leadership, sir, and to be a part of this tremendous cabinet.

How many know we have a godly, faithful cabinet and a cabinet that prioritizes prayer? On July 3rd, Mr. President, of this year, you kicked off the yearlong celebration of America's 250th birthday in Iowa. You invited America's faith communities to come together to pray for our country.

Well, Mr. President, America's faith communities are responding with overwhelming enthusiasm, as you can see here today. Today, more than seventy major faith organizations and churches have joined together to participate in what we're calling America Prays.

In fact, many of you are here today, including leaders from Pray.com, Hallow, the National Religious Broadcasters, the Faith and Freedom Coalition, Intercessors for America and many, many others are here with us.

And I want to take a moment, if you are here today and you have joined this faith movement, America Prays, please stand. If you're here this morning, please, if you're here, stand and let us see you. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Well together, we have our simple proposition. Think about this. What if one million people prayed for our country every single week between now and next July 4th? More specifically, what if believers all across this great nation got together with ten people, friends, family members, colleagues, work associates, ten people each week to pray for our country and for our fellow citizens. Let that sink in.

One million people every single week. Ten people getting together to pray for our country and for our citizens. Think about the miracles that would take place over the next year. Think about the transformation that you and I could witness in communities all across the land. Sons returning to their fathers, daughters returning to their mothers, families coming back together, health being restored, financial needs being met, mountains being moved. Think about it.

If a million of us every week got together and prayed for this great country, how many know that God is well able to do it? Amen, Amen.

We're a nation that has always believed in the power of prayer. During the Constitutional Convention, when our Founding Fathers, and many of you know this, were discussing the formation of our country, Benjamin Franklin stopped the debate and asked the delegates to pray for guidance from the Lord God Almighty. He famously said, "if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?"

How many are grateful that God put that on the heart of Benjamin Franklin on that day? Prayer brings restoration. It rebuilds what has been broken. It ignites an indescribable power of hope within you and within me. It's a light that's felt by all of those in whom we intercede and pray for.

And you've all heard faith leaders across the country quote Second Chronicles 7:14, which says, "if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sins and will heal their land."

On behalf of President Trump and ultimately the Lord God Almighty, who calls us to pray without ceasing, I'm inviting all Americans to pray with unwavering faith for the renewal of our nation and our fellow citizens. Amen? Amen. All Americans.

Will you all stand with me as we rededicate America to one nation under God? Father, we thank you for this time that we have together. Lord God, we thank you that we can gather together as faithful people, as faithful leaders, as denomination leaders, as religious leaders. Father, we thank you for our President, Donald J. Trump. Father God, whom you have anointed and appointed for this time, for such a time as this. Lord, thank you that the President prioritizes prayer, Father God, that he sees the power, the importance, the priority of praying together as a people, as a country, as a nation. Father, we in this place today in this great Museum of the Bible. Father God, we lift up our President. Lord God, we lift up his family. We lift up God, our Vice President and our cabinet and everyone God who serves in this administration through all branches of government.

Father, help us to be godly men and godly women. Father, help us to surrender to the power, to the presence, and to the will of God. And Lord, we pray this morning as we commemorate Father God, as we call our nation, to pray. Lord God, as we rededicate our nation to one nation under God, Father, we pray for your forgiveness. We pray, Lord Jesus, that you would, Lord, give us great favor and understanding. Father God, as we bow our knee before you, as we humble ourselves before you.

Lord God, we thank you that starting even right now, the families will come back together. Sons return to fathers, daughters will return to mother's healing and revitalization will take place. New life will come to our nation. And father, we're so grateful that we can stand in the nation's capital as a people of believers in this great institution.

Lord God, in the presence of God Almighty, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, we humble ourselves. We thank you and God. We know that from this day until on that great day, July 4th of 2026, when we celebrate 250 years, that Lord God, from now to then and forevermore, you will be glorified and honored.

And Father, we pray for a sweet celebration. And Lord God, that all people of all faiths, Father God, will come together. Lord, not just Democrats, not just Republican, but all American people will come together under the banner of Yahweh of God Almighty. And Lord God, we praise you and we thank you and we love you. In Jesus name, Amen. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Scott. So America has always been a nation that believes in the power of prayer, and we will never apologize for our faith ever, ever, never, never.

We will never surrender our God given rights. We will defend our liberties, our values, our sovereignty, and we will defend our freedom. And with the help of amazing faith communities across the land, so many are represented with us today. We will truly make this the golden age of America. That's what we're doing. We're in a golden age. We're at the very beginning of a golden age.

So much progress has been made in the last eight months. Progress like nobody's ever seen before. They're writing about it. They're actually saying it. They've never seen anything like what's

happened in the last eight months, and together we will make our country greater, stronger, more united and more faithful than ever before. Thank you. God bless you and God bless America.

Thank you very much.

Chairman Patrick: As we get ready to, to break, our vice chair Doctor **Ben Carson** again is going to be honored very soon, and it's an honor to have you as our vice chair and incredible moment, right? Absolutely. Incredible moment in history. So we're going to reset the stage. Why don't you give yourself minutes or an hour to take a break, grab something to eat, and we'll be back with the work of the committee. Thank you very much.

Miss Hannah Allen, Student

Miss Allen: Thank you. I'm Hannah Allen, and in 2019, I was a student at Honey Grove Middle School. Myself and a group of,

Chairman Patrick: Excuse me, let me get you to pull your mics a little closer to you or get closer to them so we can hear you.

Miss Allen: In 2019, I was a student at Honey Grove Middle School. Myself and a group of about students prayed for a former classmate who had been injured in a motor vehicle accident. We went to an unoccupied side of the cafeteria, out of the way of any other students, and said a short prayer. After our prayer, our principal addressed the group and said, "don't do that again." Myself and others were confused and some upset parents had called about the incident.

The following day, our principal informed us that we could pray, but we had to do so behind closed doors or behind a curtain. By doing this, he violated our right to freely exercise our religion. After a little research, my mom found First Liberty, who quickly got to work on our case. A letter was sent to the school informing them that they needed to amend this rule and apologize for their actions against our rights.

While our principal was apologizing, he made the whole situation seem like it was a misunderstanding and I had blown the situation out of proportion. The principal at the school, at the school never accepted fault for what they had done. However, the only thing that mattered to me was the protection of students' rights.

There was a sacrifice in standing up for these rights. I no longer felt welcome at a church I grew up going to. Teachers and parents stopped talking to my mom. I also felt as though I was treated differently from other students.

Later on in January of 2020, I was invited to tell my story in the Oval Office. I told President Trump and did a pre-interview with Fox News. I shared my story because what happened at my school wasn't right, and I know that it is going on in other schools as well. I was extremely blessed with the opportunity and honor to be a part of something bigger.

The reaction of my community was not what I had expected. Before I had even returned from Washington, teachers and parents of my school district began saying very negative things about me on social media. My family was bombarded with messages and posts saying my story was not true, and that I make this school and community look bad. I was a freshman in high school at the time, and I even had seniors talking about me and staring at me as I walked down the halls. They called me a liar and said that I just wanted my five minutes of fame. People that I had known my entire life said very hurtful things.

I went to, I went back to school despite the backlash I had received. I, not long after, my superintendent issued a letter to the entire school district stating the public and social media criticism of the district, and in particular, our administrators, has been unfair and based upon false

information. I would ask that the members of the community refrain from repeating this false information on social media, as it distracts our focus from our students and our education.

The day it was sent out, the superintendent went to every classroom except mine. He read the letter to every student but couldn't read it to me. When that letter was handed to me, I read a few sentences and walked out of the classroom. I called my mom and told her what was happening. She immediately came to the school and picked me up. When we got to the office to sign out, my superintendent was waiting for us. He told us that it wasn't a personal attack and that he would stop anyone who has said negative things about me.

My mom stated that people were already saying horrible things and he just added fuel to their fire. They took my words as a personal attack on their image rather than what they truly were. My mom and I, my mom asked me if I wanted to move schools because of the backlash. I thought about it for a while, but then I realized that with God, I was strong enough to face these people.

I felt like an outcast in my own school and my community. Some days were harder than others, but I knew that I had done the right thing. God gave me the strength to be a voice for those who didn't have one. I'm honored to be that voice.

Chairman Patrick: Members, if you want to ask a question and we'll do a few questions with each one if you wish, instead of like we did the last time till the end since we have multiple witnesses. If you hit the left button, you'll light will flash on though, or it will be red. I'll know you want to ask a question. Kelly?

Mr. Shackelford: Hannah, I think one of the cool things to know now is what are you doing now, years later, after all this persecution?

Miss Allen: Since this happened, I decided to join the military. I've been in for two years now, so that's what I've done.

Mr. Shackelford: Well, I just want to say, on behalf of a lot of Americans, that what the principal did and what the superintendent did to you as a young girl to send a letter attacking you because the President had asked you to tell your story. You didn't know the President was going to ask you to tell your story when you're in the Oval Office during Trump's first term and the disgrace of what they did, telling you you had to go behind a curtain to pray for your friend. I'm sorry, and that should have never happened to you. And we, we hope that the end of this Commission, we can stop that from happening to other young students across the country. Thank you for your courage.

Miss Allen: Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. Kelly. Our next witness is Shea. Shea, we we got a chance to hear just a little bit from you a little earlier. Was that pretty cool meeting the President? And standing with him on stage? Yes. Shea, let us hear. Let us hear your story.

Parent Perspectives on Religious Liberty in Public Schools

Mrs. Jennifer Encinas and Shea Encinas

Mrs. Encinas: I'm his mom. Mr. chairman, members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to share our story. My name is Jennifer Encinas. My husband, Carlos and I strive to live out our Christian faith daily, not just in worship, but in raising our three beautiful children. We teach our children that God made them with intention and purpose, and that He created humans as male and female, a truth unaltered by feelings or social trends. Carlos and I have always supported our school community. We volunteered regularly and our oldest son, Shea, thrived academically, socially and in leadership roles until the 2023-24 school year at La Costa Heights Elementary School in the Encinitas Union School District. On May 1st, 2024, Shea came home visibly disturbed. His normal fifth grade buddy time with kindergartners was replaced by a reading, video and chalk activity of *My Shadow Is Pink*, a book on gender identity. Shea was forced to participate in an activity promoting the book's message and teaching his kindergarten buddy about gender ideology against his beliefs.

Mr. Encinas: As my teacher read the book *My Shadow is Pink*, I could tell immediately that the message went against my beliefs. It taught that gender could be chosen based on feelings rather than the way God created us. I didn't have any choice. I had to participate. We were then told to line up and head to our buddy class, where we watched a cartoon version of the book. I felt sick, I wanted to protect my buddy, cover his eyes even, but I didn't want to get in trouble. Then we went outside to chase our buddies' shadows with chalk. The teacher told each child to pick a color to represent him or her. I felt upset and confused, but I stayed quiet because I was afraid of getting in trouble. I didn't know this was coming. I wish I could have opted out. After school, my dad picked me up and I told him everything. He was shocked and promised to talk to the school. I hoped that would make things better. Instead, it made things worse, much worse.

Mrs. Encinas: School officials never notified us, even though we had just opted out of the schools' health unit for this very reason. When we brought the concerns up to his teacher, he claimed the book wasn't about gender. Yet, the author calls it a story about gender identity, and district documents show an effort supported by groups like Trans Family Support Services to promote this ideology without parental input or awareness.

When we emailed the principal and superintendent instead of responding to us, Principal Kristi K contacted several of Shea's closest friends and their families, suggesting we were trying to get teachers fired. Sorry, and that we were hateful and we wanted to remove books about kindness and inclusivity, but all we wanted was to opt out.

We were told by several community members that Principal K coordinated with the PTA board room, parents, and others to plan a "pink out the hate day" specifically to shame our children for

objecting to being used to promote this political agenda. I received a group text message from the room mom of our younger son's class that went out to most parents in third grade saying, I just talked to the principal and asked how we can help. She said, express your support for our school and teachers. Be a louder voice. Wear pink. Send messages to Mrs. West and Mr. Murphy, or if you see them, tell them we support them. And the message of equity and inclusion.

My husband, Carlos received text messages from someone who turned out to be the husband of the teacher who introduced *My Shadow is Pink*. He told Carlos to move to a remote island and threatened him. When Carlos reported this to Superintendent Gray, she offered no help.

The PTA President and others posted on Instagram urging participation in the "pink out the hate" event. This was especially hurtful as the Instagram post spread quickly throughout the community. These were the absolute hardest days of my life as a mother. All the while I was at home taking care of our newborn daughter. I felt like I couldn't breathe, I couldn't sleep, all I could do was pray.

How could this school and these people treat our family like this? Our kids have grown up together and instead of defending them, they were acting with such hate towards them. But beyond our circle of friends, why was the school spreading lies and promoting the bullying of my nine and eleven year old sons over their religious beliefs? For example, the daughter of school board member Tom Morton messaged me saying our family was a disgrace to the community, told us to pull our kids out and warn the teachers would know we were hateful hypocrites.

Mr. Encinas: On the "pink out the hate" day, I felt like the entire school, including teachers, administrators and classmates I counted as friends were standing against me and ridiculing my beliefs. My little brother, who was also being bullied by that time because of our beliefs, refused to go to school. I cried that morning, but decided to try and be brave and see who would stand with me, but over half the school wore pink. I felt completely alone.

The rest of the school year didn't improve. Some of my friends' parents even told them not to spend time with me, but I kept trusting God. I knew He was with me and would carry me through.

Sadly, my family felt we had no choice but to withdraw from the school district I had loved. We transferred to a private school where we now feel loved, supported and safe every day. Every day I thank God for giving me a new place to grow, learn and be myself. Looking back, my experience at La Costa Heights still makes me sad, but it also reminds me how strong my faith is and how faithful God has been to me. I'm sharing my story not for attention, but in the hope that no other child or family has to go through what mine did.

Mrs. Encinas: With the help of First Liberty Institute, we filed a lawsuit to help make sure parents in the future have the right to know and opt out of situations like this. Still, even after leaving and successfully asserting our rights, the harassment continues. Our hope is that sharing our story today will preserve the rights of parents to direct their children's moral and religious upbringings, especially on sensitive topics like sex and gender. Thank you for your time.

Chairman Patrick: Member, members, if you want to make a comment or ask a question, hit your left button. Doctor Carson.

Doctor Carson: Shea, that's a very impressive display of courage, and I think that that's what's missing. When I was running for President, I traveled all over the country and discovered that from the smallest little hamlets to the largest cities, one thing that the American people shared in common was common sense, but I also discovered that what they shared in common was lack of courage, and you got to be brave if you're going to be free. What, what gave you your courage and what would you suggest for others?

Mr. Encinas: Well, I just I really wanted to stand up for my rights. That's what gave me the courage. Like, I knew that God was going to be with me the whole time. And that's, that's what gave me the motivation to keep going and to keep fighting for my rights, because I didn't want it to happen to any other family.

Doctor Carson: That's a great example.

Chairman Patrick: Carrie.

Ms. Boller: I just want to say you are a hero. Shea. You really are.

Mr. Encinas: Thank you.

Ms. Boller: I am so proud of, I would like Carlos to stand, the father, and we can all give him a round of applause for raising an incredible son. Thank you, Carlos, and thank you, Jenny. You two have raised an incredible son who is a hero to so many, and I want to say that this is in my district in California. This is a radical school district, and so thank you, First Liberty, for taking on this case. One of the other attorneys is here today, Rob Reynolds. Thank you, Rob, for being a part of this case, and I hope you take it all the way and you receive the justice you deserve. Thank you. Shea.

Chairman Patrick: Any other questions? Jenny, were there any repercussions for that principal and that school district?

Mrs. Encinas: She was actually promoted, and the teacher who was involved was promoted. Everybody has just been praised. There was a school board meeting after this event occurred where my husband tried to speak out, and the teacher's union came in full force with matching shirts and doubled down on their message of equity and inclusion. And it was so just, hurtful that they didn't realize, like they were attacking my son with that event. And the whole message of equity and inclusion was there for everybody except Christians. So no, there's been no repercussions.

Chairman Patrick: Not only was it a denial of your religious liberty, it was just mean and hurtful. And I think it's hard for America watching to understand why a principal, a teacher, an entire school system, and so many parents were so mean and so hurtful.

Mrs. Encinas: I agree, we, we still don't know it. It changed our community, our whole trajectory of our lives, but we're here today. And just thank you for this opportunity to share this story. I'm sorry it makes me so emotional because it was a lot to go through.

Chairman Patrick: Hey, a number of us could tear up on this story. Shea, I have a grandson, looks just like you. You could be brothers, your age, and I would hate to think that anyone would hurt my grandson like they hurt yours. And everyone should understand that can happen to your child, your grandchildren. Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. and Mrs. Encinas: Thank you, thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Our next witness, I hope I'm saying this right, Alyssa Lewin Hello. Do I have the right person on my list? Yes. No. Yes. Say that, yes. We'll go to Lana Roman and we'll see what's, okay Lana, you're next.

Svitlana Roman, Montgomery County Parent

Mrs. Roman: Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson and members of the Religious Liberty Commission, thank you for having me here today. My name is Svetlana Roman, and I'm here today as a mother and the Ukrainian Orthodox Christian. My husband, Jeffrey and I were among the many families in Montgomery County, Maryland, who were forced to go all the way to the United States Supreme Court to defend our constitutional rights to religious freedom. I'm here today to bring attention to the assault on religious freedoms that is being carried out in public schools around the country.

My husband grew up in Montgomery County and insisted that we move to a very specific district within the county because of the renowned quality public education he remembered growing up. When we sent our young son to elementary school, we expected the school to educate him in reading, writing and math. While we as parents would bear the responsibility and duty to teach our faith and values and guide his spiritual and moral formation.

In 2022, Montgomery County first introduced storybooks focusing on gender transitions and same sex romance to the elementary curriculum. As Christians, we teach our son that every person is loved by God and should be treated with dignity and respect. We also teach him that sex is a gift from God and a natural, unchanging part of who we are.

Many of these books introduce sexual concepts to children at inappropriately young age, putting the children into untenable position of having to question who to trust: their teachers or their parents. Rather than focusing on simple, basic civility and kindness, these books championed pride parades, gender transitioning, and pronoun preferences for elementary age children, elementary age children who are just beginning to learn phonics.

Some books encourage students to discuss what it means to be non-binary. Other books told students that doctors only guess when identifying a newborn's sex. Teachers were instructed to tell students that they were being hurtful if they questioned these controversial ideologies.

In Maryland, as in most states, instruction about family life and human sexuality in health class requires parental notification and an explicit signed parental approval, effectively an opt in. Somehow, these books were receiving a different treatment, with no requirement for parental opt in.

Parent concerns with the new curriculum were widespread, and at first, the school board honored opt out requests. Montgomery County is the nation's most religiously diverse county. Many of the school principals warned the school board that many families would be offended by the books, and concerned that they were not age appropriate, so, as a reasonable person might anticipate, a large number of parents look to opt out from these lessons. But instead of reconsidering the curriculum, the school board was tone deaf to many concerns that were raised and revoked any notification and opt outs altogether.

This unprecedented decision by the board turned what should have been a conversation between parents and educators into a conflict that never needed to exist in the first place. Even though we never asked the school to remove the books, the board, the board suddenly disregarded a longstanding tradition, Maryland law, and the nationwide consensus on parental opt outs.

We were denied the obvious and simple solution that would allow our children to not be exposed to content that directly contradicts our religious beliefs and teachings. In the name of inclusivity, the school board disregarded, alienated, and excluded faith-based communities from consideration.

It took two years for the Supreme Court's decision, which agreed with us and affirmed that parents have the right to opt out their children out of the storybooks, restoring the status quo. In the meantime, most families had to make significant changes and sacrifices in order to not forfeit their faith.

The court said that teaching these books without opt outs was an unconstitutional burden to our free exercise rights as parents, as the court put it, it is both insulting and legally unsound to tell parents that they must abstain from public education in order to raise their children in their religious faith, when alternatives can be prohibitively expensive and they contribute to financing the public schools.

As a mother, my love for my child compels me to guide his formation, to protect his young, developing heart and mind. Parents, not teachers, schools or the government carry the primary responsibility - I'm just thinking about your story - of how they raised their children.

However, the school board's total disregard of reasonable parents, concerns that we experience in Montgomery County is only a symptom of a much more systemic nationwide problem in educational culture that is hostile to religion and historically Orthodox, Orthodox religious views.

Our case should be the beginning, not the end, of building an educational system that is more responsive to religious rights and parental concerns.

As a Commissioners, you have the opportunity to continue the work that families in Montgomery County started and thank you for everything you will do to make sure that schools across the country honor the Supreme Court's decision, *Mahmood vs. Taylor*. Thank you.

Sameerah Munshi

Chairman Patrick: Samira munshi.

Ms. Munshi: Bismillah. Alhamdulillah Allah. I begin in the name of God, most gracious, most merciful. Hi, my name is Samir Munshi. I was born and raised in southwest Missouri where, as you can probably imagine, I grew up involved in a lot of interfaith conversations and these conversations led me to my work today as an activist and advocate for the Muslim community in America.

I'm the former executive director of the Coalition of Virtue, and I currently serve on an advisory board to the Religious Liberty Commission. I was asked to speak today because of my work with families and students in Montgomery County, Maryland, during the 2023 school district opt out protests. The efforts of these families ultimately led to the Supreme Court case, *Mahmood vs. Taylor*, that recently ruled in favor of their rights.

Today, I want to share more about what we experienced during that time in organizing, why it matters, and what I believe this Commission can do to meaningfully protect freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, especially in the classroom.

To begin, I'll offer some background, as Svetlana probably already gave most of it, but in 2023, Montgomery County Public School System, while instituting mandatory classroom content on issues of gender and sexuality, stated they would no longer allow parents to opt their children out of such content when in the past they had. As a result, many families, including Muslim, Christian and Jewish parents and students were concerned, to say the least, and Muslims quickly realized as she mentioned, as religiously diverse community and with a lot of Muslims and the Muslim community there, realized that we needed to do something about what was going on.

So Muslim leaders reached out to these other faith communities to organize and make our voices heard, and we faced a lot of backlash. In that backlash, we were called things like white supremacists and backward. We were reminded that Muslims are not only marginalized religiously, but in every move we make, we are treated as outsiders whose rights are conditional or an afterthought.

What happened in Montgomery County was not about Muslims and other people of faith trying to impose their values on others. It was about refusing to have others values imposed on us. It was about the right to dissent without being demonized.

Freedom of speech means little if certain communities are socially or legally punished for using it. On issues like how to navigate topic, the topic of LGBTQ Muslim community holds a wide range of views, and while these are conversations that are currently ongoing in our community, what is important is to accommodate American Muslims and other practitioners of religion within the law, regardless of their political affiliation or diversity of views, especially when they believe their religion to directly influence their views.

Religious freedom demands free expression of belief, even if it conflicts with the beliefs of others. We've seen so much suppression and demonization, specifically of Muslims speaking out on LGBTQ, but also on issues like Palestine based on the values of our faith. Take the example of when the Lower Merion School District forced a Muslim high schooler to remove her headscarf during graduation because it had a keffiyeh pattern, a symbol of Palestine, or when students were given the opportunity to paint their parking spaces in a New York high school parking lot with a design of their choosing, a Muslim student painted a watermelon on her parking space to represent Palestine with the words peace be upon you, and the school painted over it, similar to the case Jeremy Dice mentioned earlier on.

These are just a couple, but there are many examples of this kind of silencing. The values of all of our faiths teach us to speak up for humanity and morality, no matter who it is for or against. Whether a student says, I believe there are only two genders, or I believe Palestinians are, Palestinians are undergoing a genocide, they should not be silenced or punished for expressing their beliefs.

If religious freedom is to have any meaning at all, it must provide people of faith the freedom to express their convictions, and Palestine, Masjid Al Aqsa and opposition to genocide are intrinsically religious issues for Muslims, not merely secular ones. We speak up for Gaza and oppressed people around the world, because our religion teaches us that these are our brothers and sisters in humanity and faith, that justice is non-negotiable, that human dignity is sacrosanct, and that genocide is wrong.

I'd like to offer some recommendations to the Commission. So first, opt out protections must be made clear, accessible and enforceable. Oftentimes, these policies are in place on paper, but can be difficult to actualize. Second, laws on religious liberty must be implemented with transparency and consistency. Public institutions need guidance and accountability to ensure that they're not silencing only a particular viewpoint or voices on one particular issue.

I sincerely hope and pray that your devotion to God and loyalty to this country, the Constitution and the vision of our Founders supersedes any external pressures or negative assumptions of our faith that may push you to overlook the rights of American Muslims, and that you act to preserve our rights as Americans to freedom of conscience, free speech, and free exercise. Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Paula.

Pastor White: Yes, thank you both so much. The First Amendment protects the right of parents to direct their children's education and upbringing, and the court has reaffirmed this and affirmed this truth many times, most recently in my mood *vs.* Taylor. So how can this administration ensure that the state and local governments protect parental rights and educational context? And how can we hold them accountable to follow the law?

Chairman Patrick: Anyone can answer that.

Mrs. Roman: I'll try to address the question. To be very honest and transparent, because the health and human Sexuality and Health curriculum is an actual opt in, I personally believe these type of materials just need to go into the health and human sexuality curriculum piece - that way every parent treats it the same exact way. Otherwise, these materials are embedded into educational system not only in your English classes. They're in math. These materials are just saturated through the curriculum, starting with elementary schools.

Ms. Munshi: And I would add that there needs to be clear guidelines in place and communicated very clearly to both the school boards, the school districts, and also the students and parents in those districts explaining exactly what they are allowed to opt out from, in what scenarios, etc.

Chairman Patrick: Dave, go ahead.

Mr. Cortman: I was just going to add two suggestions. One of them is there are certain states that have protections for families, rights and responsibilities in schools, and to have a federal act to encourage Congress and the administration to pass a federal act, because that protects all parental rights, not only to be notified of these things going on, but to also to make sure that there's opt out options that have some teeth to them.

Chairman Patrick: Dave, is this phenomena? This didn't happen, as we like to say, when we were in school. When did this begin? When did this shift begin?

Mr. Cortman: I think this is one of those things that it doesn't happen overnight, but it feels like when certain elite institutions, the media, academia, Hollywood, catch on to a particular theme, then they run with it and they act like all of us don't exist. And the majority of people everywhere accept all these transgender things they're doing to kids and to preferred pronouns and names, and the things that I think most Americans would object to, regardless of what your political or ideological stance. So I think it sets its foot, and what they do is they shame us from speaking out against it by labeling us as haters and bigots, ostracizing us, pushing out of the schools, so we have no voice at all. And so I think it's happened over a period of years. I think it's going to continue to happen unless all of us take a stand. This Commission is a great way to stop it, President Trump seeing this and doing something about it. But I think all of us need to be more vocal, not less. Don't be afraid of being shamed to stand for what you believe in, because it's one of the most important things our country is founded on.

Mrs. Jennifer Mead, Parent

Chairman Patrick: Our next witness is Jennifer Mead.

Mrs. Mead: Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to share our story today. There is nothing more precious to a mother and a father than their child, and there's nothing we wouldn't sacrifice to help them thrive. It is our God given duty to guide them emotionally, physically, and spiritually. And as a mother, when I place my children in the temporary care of others, like at school, I don't surrender my parental rights.

Like most parents, my husband and I expect transparency and truth about how our children are doing in school to help, to help them along their way, but tragically, this was not our story. Soon after, our eleven-year-old daughter started sixth grade at East Rockford Middle School, we noticed some changes. She seemed anxious, sad, and withdrawn. We thought it might be the stress of middle school, which can be hard for kids, so we continued to encourage her, support her, and make sure that she knew how deeply she was loved.

As a school year went on, she started to fall behind academically, and I began working closely with her teachers and the school counselor. We wanted to do everything we could to ensure that she flourished at school. I wanted her to know that we are in her corner. We would help her navigate any problems she faced and that Jesus was right beside her every single day.

Throughout seventh grade, we remained in close contact with the school, and I was especially grateful for the school counselor's help, and I valued the connection that she had made with my daughter. Still struggling, my husband and I took our daughter to see a psychologist who diagnosed her with autism. We shared that very personal information with the school counselor to ensure that she received the support and accommodations that she needed to thrive. It felt like a partnership with the school, and we even met up with the counselor for ice cream with both of our daughters. that following summer.

So given the regular and transparent communication that Dan and I had with the school counselor, I trusted this woman wholeheartedly, until everything changed. In the fall of eighth grade, a school employee sent us an academic report with notes from my daughter's past and current teachers, but oddly, some of the teacher's notes talked about a boy, or at least referred to a boy's name and used male pronouns. I assumed this was a mistake, so I emailed the school employee to see if she had inadvertently included another child's information in the report, but she didn't respond.

My husband and I discovered that the school, including the counselor that we had put so much trust in, was socially transitioning our daughter and hiding it from us. We later found out that teachers and staff had been treating our daughter as a boy without our knowledge. They continued to, to use her real name and pronouns when communicating with us. I was shocked, betrayed and heartbroken.

We met with the principal, hoping that he would be as shocked as we were, but he wasn't. He said it was school district and Michigan policy to treat our little girl as boy without telling us. Going into this meeting. Dan and I had hoped that the principal would be as concerned as we were, but we left feeling devastated and not sure what to do next. There really are no words to capture the traumatic impact of the school's action on our young daughter and our family, and in the days and weeks that followed, it was like she was emerging from a cult. Multiple times a day she would ask us if we loved her. She had been taught to not trust us, that we wouldn't understand her and that we wouldn't accept her, which is absolutely false.

But what really broke my heart is that my sweet girl, she was led to believe that she was broken. and she is not. She was made in the image of God and she is beautiful, intelligent and kind.

And every single day since then, it has taken an unwavering effort to rebuild her fractured confidence in herself and to restore her shattered trust in us, her family, her protectors. We've dedicated ourselves to showing her that she is valued, she is safe and she is loved, and we are slowly mending the threads of her self-worth and the bonds that were so carelessly broken.

Witnessing the devastating harm that our daughter suffered drove my husband and I, with the help of Alliance Defending Freedom, to file a lawsuit against Rockford Public School District. We, we asked ourselves, how could we ever face another parent, look them in the eyes, knowing that their child, like ours, might be undergoing a life altering transition without their knowledge or consent and we had remained silent?

We knew that we had to take a stand to protect not only our daughter, but other children in other families as well. And as a very private person, I was intimidated at first, but our Almighty God has given me the courage and the strength to take a public stand and hold the school accountable for nearly shattering my daughter's life.

And no school, no school district has the right to make life altering decisions for a child without talking to their parents - let alone concealing those decisions from us, ever, under no circumstances.

So today, I am honored to be here, and I thank the Commission and to President Trump for the opportunity to share our family's story with you, and I pray that it will help ensure that no other families suffer.

Chairman Patrick: Doctor Phil.

Doctor Phil: Well, I want to thank you for your, I want to thank you for your testimony, and, you know, there's a lot that we have to acknowledge in the consistency of what we're hearing from these witnesses, Mr. chairman. And the consistency that we're hearing is our society, we train our children to respect adults. We train our children when they go out into the world to, you, you respect adults, you, you mind adults, you do what adults tell you to do, and you respect authority. That doesn't seem to work anymore because we've had a narrative hijacked in this country, and we're in a religious and cultural war.

And, excuse me, we're in a religious and cultural war, and supposedly psychology and faith are supposed to be mutually exclusive, and they absolutely are not. I am a Christian, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and have since I was thirteen years old, and I see no inconsistency.

What I realize is that we are in a religious and cultural war right now, and every single one of us is a combatant. Nobody can afford to sit on the sidelines. Not one of us can afford to sit on the sidelines.

And make no mistake, not choosing is a choice. If you choose, "I choose not to participate," that is a choice. You're making an active choice to say, "I'm going to stay silent and, and cede my vote, my voice to those that speak the loudest and those that are shrill," and we cannot afford to do that.

And family is in attack, is under attack in America. Your family, your family, your family, your family, your family. You're all saying that you've been targeted and attacked and it's terrible, what is happening.

Because make no mistake, family is the backbone of this country and this society. It's about faith and family and country. And let me tell you, 99% of teachers will agree with that. It's, it's not the teachers. It's the teachers unions who are setting policy and pushing this. 99% of the teachers want to teach reading and writing and arithmetic and history and, and do what they say.

And the problem on a societal level is if you look at every major medical association of America, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, they've all signed off. They've all signed off on gender affirming care, which, by the way, is not a thing. It's a marketing term. It's not a treatment. There is no treatment protocol for gender affirming care. It's just a marketing term.

And there are things such as the Cass Report, which was published in April, April 10th of '24 in the UK that has looked to see are there, can you say there are not long term problems with the these testosterone blockers, hormone treatments, surgery? And the answer is absolutely no. There is no data to support this whatsoever. There are long term problems with this, even social transition as opposed to treating gender dysphoria with evidence-based therapies, which are available. And the answer is that you can treat these things without long term complications.

And, and so we have teachers in the classroom doing exactly what you were saying, conspiring with your child to lie to their parents. What are they teaching these children? They're conspiring that it's okay to lie to your parents, and then they're dealing with these issues in the classroom, and they are not trained or prepared to do it any more than they're prepared to take out a spleen. You know, Ben, would these teachers be qualified to take out a child spleen? No, and they're not any more prepared to deal with this. They're not trained to do that. It's not their fault, but they're not trained to do it.

So you've got children who can't decide which pajamas to wear, and they're going to pick to change something that's irreversible in their lives? It's absolute insanity. Enough is enough, and

too much is too much. And we need to find our collective voice and stand up and say, enough is enough and too much is too much.

And when you, when you think about what has happened, the courage of you, witnesses that have come here today, because we have a President that has sat down who has looked at all the things to deal with in a world that is willing to go to war, a situation with economic issues, all of the things on the radar screen, but to sit down and thoughtfully say, “you know what? We need to deal with religious liberty in this country and to put all of this together to come here, and we need to be equal to the challenge.”

And God bless every one of you for coming here and sharing your story and challenging all of us to do something with it, so thank you. And we all need to be combatants in this war, this religious war, in this cultural war, we all need to be combatants in that and say, we’ll not allow this to happen. We will not allow this to happen. God knows the truth and expects us to live it. Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you, Dr. Phil. Bishop Barron?

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron: Yeah, Doctor Phil really said what I wanted to say. Been so struck by the testimonies this morning and this afternoon, and they bring things that are more abstract home and we really can feel what people are going through.

The thing we’re dealing with, the cultural war that Doctor Phil talks about began, it seems to me, in Europe, mid 20th century, critical theory. It begins in the Academy of Germany and France. It comes into our country by the 1970s, gestates there for a long time and then for a variety of reasons, kind of spilled into the streets and the mediating institutions of our country in fairly recent years and very quickly co-opted the, the mainstream of the institutions. And that’s what we’re seeing, that that expresses itself in these really horrific policies that you’re testifying to, the abuse of children involved here. That’s what strikes me.

When I was a kid, I think we the first sex ed class we had was with a doctor and a priest when I was about seventh grade and discussing the biological dimension, but the moral and religious dimension of it. But to be talking to a seven-year-old about gender and gender queering and changing genders strikes me as psychologically abusive, and then this physical business is physically abusive to children.

And so this is a problem that started in the high academy, came into our academy, came into our media and institutions. No God, no objective moral value, a fluid human nature, and it’s just downright dangerous. And I think we do, thank God, I think, for the existence of this Commission.

But I agree with Doctor Phil, we have to really find our courage to stand against it, and I think at this point there has to be executive orders and legislation to deal with it, because it’s reached a point where you see the, the harm it’s causing in people’s minds and hearts and bodies. So I’m

grateful for the testimony because it sort of steels me in my own conviction about this, so thank you for that.

Chairman Patrick: Carrie.

Commissioner Mrs. Prejean Boller: Jennifer. You're Jennifer? Oh my goodness. Your, your testimony really touched me as a mother. I have two children and I can feel the heartbreak from your words, and I want to say thank you for spearheading this. All of you mothers and fathers, thank you for your courage because it really starts with you. How is your sweet girl doing today?

Mrs. Mead: Thank you for asking. I'm glad that we're on the other side of it, because I wasn't sure what this was, what that was going to look like, and I don't, I don't know what's to come, but we are in a really good place with her. She is homeschooled. She is excelling in her learning environment. She is happy. She no longer asks me or my husband if she's loved or that she can trust us, so she's in a really good place and she talks about her future as a mother and getting married and yeah.

So I am just so thankful that, I'm thankful that we've gone over that hump and that we have just continued to love her and to let her know that she, she is made in the image of God and that she is not broken and she is perfect as she is, and that she cannot choose to be another gender. We just been straight up honest and talk about truth with her, and once we pulled her out of that environment, like I mentioned in my testimony, it really was like pulling her from a cult, so it's just, we're just continuing to heal.

Chairman Patrick: Doctor Anderson, Ryan?

Commissioner Dr. Ryan Anderson: Great. Thank you. I wanted to draw out three lessons, I think, from the witnesses that we've had so far, just to kind of underscore these points. Hopefully they can make it into the recommendations that we eventually make as a Commission.

And the first goes back to the very first hearing we had during my opening comments, I said frequently religious liberty violations are a result of unjust laws in the first place. And I think if you listen to the witnesses just now, to have a child transition period, let alone behind a parent's back, that is simply unjust. It doesn't matter if the parent is religious or non-religious. It doesn't matter if that student is religious or non-religious. Right, to be doing this to minors at schools without parental involvement consent, that in and of itself is unjust.

And so, I think one, same thing is true for the Montgomery County school situation or the what was the book that you had to read to your buddy, right? Any student who is being indoctrinated with gender ideology is being mis-served by the school system. These are unjust policies with these book mandates, unjust policies with these secret transitions.

And so I think, first and foremost, rather than just asking for an opt out or religious carve out, we should be pushing back on the unjust policy, right? The secular parents in Montgomery County shouldn't be subjected to this.

And so I was so grateful for what President Trump said this morning about, he went through the litany of everything they've done to combat gender ideology, and that's important. We can't just religiously, liberally opt ourselves out of this. We also need to directly combat it. So that was the first point, is that these unjust laws are frequently the underlying problem, and we need to fight on all fours there.

Second, and this really came out in this morning's witnesses. It seems that there's a certain type of public-school administrator who thinks that functional, practical atheism is neutrality. One of the students said that she was told by the principal, "well, not everyone believes in God," and therefore the school is going to make everyone pretend that they don't believe in God. We're going to practically be atheists at this school as if that equals neutrality. The Founders's vision was that Jewish students could be authentically Jewish. Muslim students could be authentically Muslim. Protestant students could be authentically Protestant. Catholics could be authentically Catholic. It would be pluralistic, theism and deism in in the public schools. We've now gotten ourselves in a place where we think the naked public square should now be applied to the schoolroom. Right, we should have naked schoolrooms. This is the imagery from Richard John Neuhaus, Father Neuhaus, who wrote that book back in the late 70s, early 80s. I think that's a huge problem here, is that we've allowed ourselves to think that secularism is somehow neutral and it's not.

And then the third thing, I was struck by the speaker this morning who said something along the lines of "my faith in Jesus, isn't something added to my story. It is my story." Almost everyone, I think, everyone who spoke today, I could see that through their body language, through what they said that they have. They're living lives of integrity, where their faith is integrated with every other aspect of their life.

And so, my challenge here for the Commission is I think we should make as strong of an argument as we can for why school choice itself should be a requirement of religious liberty. I really appreciated President Trump this morning. In his prepared remarks, he spoke about school choice. He spoke about parental rights. I think free exercise of religion, parental rights and education, school choice, these things all go together.

My wife and I were blessed, we have five children. We live in Loudoun County. Loudoun County competes with Montgomery County to see which one can be more woke and which one can indoctrinate the kids more aggressively. We could never send our kids to the government-run schools. Thankfully, we have the resources to send our kids to a classical Christian school.

Why should people in our county who don't have those financial resources be trapped in the government run schools? That is the violation. I think we have to go on all fours.

Chairman Patrick: Reverend Franklin?

Commissioner Rev. Graham: I think, Shea, when you and your testimony, your, it was mentioned that the teacher and the administrators, principal were promoted, if I'm not correct. And when there was hearings, the teacher unions all showed up with their t shirts, all supporting the teachers that

have done this. And if you want to fix a problem, we have to identify what needs to get fixed. And the one thing that, there's a thread that kind of runs through all this, and it's called the unions.

And we say cultural wars and we say, I don't think it's so much of a cultural war. I mean, I don't, I don't think most of culture understands what's going on in these schools. It's a, it's a very subtle, demonic-type takeover of our children and is being forced down the throats of people by unions. And so I don't know, Mr. Chairman, there needs to be some thought about making these unions accountable.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. I find it interesting in Texas, and Doctor Phil, you talked about "we're combatants." We're seeing this move toward school choice more and more states—Texas is the latest—you see people quietly leaving the schools is what's happening. So, they're combatants but they're quiet about it. So, this is what's going on, but they're not in the fight like all of you are.

We see homeschool in Texas. It was illegal to homeschool years ago, and now we think in the last three years it's doubled, somewhere around 700,000, students. We don't know exactly how many. There's also an interesting phenomena that in 2019, in Texas, we had 5.4 million students in public schools. That's more than 26 states have people. 5.4 million. We add 1000 people a day, but today we only have 5.5 million kids in school. So how is it - now the lower birth rate is a part of that - how is it that we are now the second most populous state in the country and yet the school population over six years has only increased by 100,000 kids. It tells you people are walking away, but they're not telling enough people why they're, why they're walking away.

So your testimony has been really powerful today, and these are all great points that will be in our final report. And Dave, you're our last witness on this panel.

David Cortman, Attorney, ADF

Mr. David Cortman: Thank you Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and members of the Commission. I want to just jump right in because of all the comments we've had. Interesting, as Doctor Anderson was speaking, I thought he got my presentation and was actually looking at it. But I wanted to focus today on the two main areas where I believe public schools are failing American parents and their children, and trampling on religious liberty.

One of them is, rather than concentrating on what we used to call the three R's reading, writing and arithmetic, schools are now pushing these radical social agendas that often violate religious beliefs of parents. We'll talk about some of those similar to the Meads, but second, even though it has presented no real impediment to the practice of religion for the last decade and a half, the Establishment Clause still rears its ugly head that we have to cleanse all religion from public schools, which is so far from the truth. I think these are the two, the two headed monster, if you will.

So just talking about a few instances of religious hostility. We heard from a cute, little Lydia this morning about her mask. What was interesting about it is her mask didn't say "Jesus loves you." It said, "Jesus loves me" on it. It was her own personal faith, and the fact that a nine year old has been brave enough in the courage to go to school with that mask on, regardless of what else she sees, and then go to her parents and say, "look, I think this is wrong. They told me to take my mask off. I think there's something wrong with that." What was interesting about that case was there was no policy that prohibited a religious mask. There was no policy that prohibited words on the mask. When they looked up the policy as her mom, she said she was curious. We've known them for years. She's her, both her great parents looked up all the research, researched all the policies. There wasn't anything that addressed it. When he finally gave them a copy of the policy, he actually changed the policy right before he sent it to him to cover his own tracks. And the only reason was, we can't let this little girl go to school with a mask that says, "Jesus loves me."

In this country, that's incredible. I mean, all the things that go on in public schools that you should be concerned about, that certainly isn't one of them. So it's one of these things where you see this reaction almost to anything religious in the public schools about the stories that we heard today.

Another one real quickly, is similar to the talent show story you heard this morning. We had a young gentleman, Brian Hickman, out of out of California. This kid was one of the most special kids you ever want to meet. He had cerebral palsy. He's been through more surgeries and physical struggles than almost all of us will in a lifetime. For an upcoming talent show, he wanted to perform to a Christian song called "We Shine." He was excited. He was practicing at his church for weeks. He was ready to do it. When he went to the auditions, school officials told Brian's mother that the song was quote unquote, "too religious," and get this, "it said Jesus too many times." I'm not really sure what the school thought the right number of Jesus was in that song, but apparently whatever it was too many.

But the school there similarly didn't have a policy that banned religion. It didn't have a policy that said anything about the songs that could be chosen. If you looked at some of the lyrics for what the other kids were choosing, you would want them banned from school. They allowed those to happen.

What the school said was the separation of church and state required it, and there have been Supreme Court cases for the last several decades that have taken care of that. That's no longer an issue in the schools, but we still have school administrators being taught by not only state school boards, by policies in the schools, by the unions. We still have this force that are teaching your average school official and teacher, which I think are good hearted to say, look, this is what the law is and they don't know any better.

So, one of the areas I think we need to address is educating the teachers, educating school officials on what the actual separation of church and state is, which is not this, this ban on anything religious. It's basically the freedom of religion under the Constitution to allow robust exercise of religion regardless of your faith, and that's what needs to be taught to our officials.

Interestingly, when, when Brian and his parents filed that lawsuit, we got a good resolution. He got to perform in the talent show on that Friday night, which was a couple of days away, so we were kind of scrambling to get, get something filed. The coolest thing was when Brian did his song, we didn't know what the community reaction was going to be. Brian got a standing ovation at the talent show.

And the icing on top of the cake was we got that policy changed that protected more than half a million students who are now allowed to exercise their faith at events at public schools, so really neat for Brian and his family standing up.

But one of the most chilling threats, I think, these days is what Jennifer talked about, and that is schools indoctrinating students in these current social issues where school officials not only decide they know better than parents about how to raise their child, but the fact that as, as Brian mentioned, that they're hiding it from parents. It's just truly egregious. This is not an isolated occurrence.

Chairman, in, in your state in Texas, we've got a situation in the Houston Area School District where they did the same exact thing. They were socially transitioning our client's daughter, and they were lying to the parents about it for months and months over certain, over two school years. And whenever the parents raised it and said, look, "we're, we're taking care of it. Please don't, don't do this. Don't call her by pronouns that are the wrong sex." They said no. Not only did, they ignored it, but they said, we have a right under the law to do this to your children, even without your permission, and that's in, that's in Texas.

We have families in New York that are going through similar experiences, but one of the ones that's just as egregious is where public schools are passing these policies, where they're forcing young girls to share restrooms, locker rooms, and even sleeping accommodations on school trips

with boys. In Colorado, we have a family that we represent, the Wales family that sent their daughter on a school trip here to DC, which I think we've all done when we were kids. It was great coming here, seeing all the monuments and everything in Washington. They found out on the night she was about to go to sleep that they, they scheduled her to room with a boy with, with two other girls, and then their daughter was supposed to end up in the same bed as this boy, never telling the parents or the daughter that this was going to happen. And when the daughter found out, it was only because the young man told her and they were like, no, it's fine. She could sleep in the other bed, you know, even in the same hotel room where they're changing and dressing.

And what was interesting when we challenged this, the school district is still defending their policy and saying that they have a right to decide under their quote unquote, nondiscrimination policies, that they get to room these young men who identify as girls with the young women at these young ages.

So these are the stories that I think are the most egregious and this is not education. This is not what the schools are for. This is not the three R's that we talked about. This is indoctrination. It's coercion. It's deception. It's cloaked in an arrogance that these school officials think they know better than all the parents that we've heard from about how to raise their kids, and I think it's one of the most serious threats that we have today to parental rights and religious liberty.

So how do we protect them? We talked about a couple of things already. One, I would recommend passing the federal Families Rights and Responsibilities Act. There are, several states have similar legislation, and it covers almost everything we've discussed today. It makes sure the schools disclose everything that they do and whether it's an opt out, whether it's field trips, whether it's curriculum - it makes sure it respects the parents' rights in the public school.

Almost every single lawsuit, the response by the school district is, is that parents don't have a right to control the curriculum. That's their response, as their young daughter is supposed to sleep with a boy on a field trip. That's their response when they're teaching kindergarten students about how many different genders there are, and it's fluid. Their response is, you don't have any right to control the curriculum, and I think that's a major problem.

We talked about Ryan, talked about school choice. Educational freedom is so important not only for voucher programs, not only for release time education, but those parents who choose to stay in public schools, not to be vilified, not to be ostracized, not to be kicked out, but to have a voice and have a right to stay in that school so they could be salt and light to others.

How many people are looking at these young boys and girls saying, "wow, look at how courageous they are. I wish I could do that," but they're too, they're too afraid to take a stand.

And last thing I would say is we need to educate parents and students about what their rights are. In prepping for this, I read a study recently that said only about one three Americans even know that religious freedom is in the First Amendment. How can you defend your rights when you don't know what they are? So I would recommend actually doing training both for parents and school

officials on what actual First Amendment rights are, so that freedom of religion for all religions is respected in our public schools. Thank you for your time today.

Chairman Patrick: I only introduced him as Dave. It's Dave Courtman with Americans Defending Freedom, so I want to do that officially. Kelly?

Mr. Shackelford: You know, one of the thoughts that came to my mind, both in the earlier testimony and the ones now, is when Jesus said, "better to have a millstone tied around your neck and thrown into the sea than to make one of these little ones stumble." I mean, this is, we have to address this.

And Dave, I appreciate your recommendations and I just want to add one to the list, I guess, because I know we keep track of all these, that what we say in this and we're going to go back and look at all these later. But we had Department of Education guidelines on religious liberty that President Clinton put, put in place, but there's been so many cases since then, including on parental rights, major, *Mahmoud*, and I think those ought to be updated and strengthened so that they're accurate now.

And then, the follow up to that is obviously the President has shown he's willing to do this with universities. We need to make it that any school district that does not follow these has their federal money taken away from them.

And then maybe we can add, Dave, your suggestion into that, that their training is responsible under those guidelines. And then that is something where we can begin to hopefully educate the school districts, and there's a consequence, if you're doing this to the people in your school district.

Chairman Patrick: I'd take the state money away as well. Some of that is constitutionally required, but we can work on that. Allyson.

Ms. Allyson Ho: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've really been struck today in the testimony by almost to a person, all of you all have said, you know, "I'm not out for my five minutes. I'm a private person. I'm standing up so that others don't have to go through what we've gone through." And I just want to acknowledge and, and thank you all for what you're doing, because for each of you on this stage, there are other children and families and parents that will not have to go through what you have had to do for being our standard bearers, for being the first through the wall that gets bloodied.

And I just especially, Shea, I just want to I just want to single you out if I can. We talk, we talk a lot about courage. We talk a lot about what that means and what that looks like. You and your mom, everyone on this panel, everyone that we've heard today are courageous, and you are standing. You're taking the heat. You're taking the arrows, so that no one else has to go through. And, and shame on us if we do not honor your courage and your tears and your agony and your sorrow by standing up and using the platform the President has given us to also stand with you in

ensuring that no other child or family or individual has to go through the horrible stories that we have heard today. Thank you all so much.

Chairman Patrick: Bishop Barron.

Bishop Baron: Yeah, Dave, thank you very much for that presentation. I very much enjoyed it and found it clarifying. I think everybody in this room would agree that the anti-establishment clause has been kind of grossly overread, overinterpreted in an academic setting. But just for the sake of clarifying my own thinking and with our opponents in mind, give me an example of what would be a violation of the anti-establishment clause in an academic setting. So we all know these are kind of gross violations of that principle. Can you, what's an example of where we say that really is a violation of it?

Mr. David Cortman: I think the easy example comes to mind is forcing students to pray outside of their religious faith.

Bishop Baron: Yeah. So compelling.

Mr. David Cortman: So, so compelling coercion. There's there's different types of tests under the Establishment Clause. I won't bore you with them, but a lot of the justices say that the right test is, am I coercing you to violate your faith? Are you participating in some speech or act that violates your particular religious freedom? That would be a clear violation of the Establishment Clause. And don't forget, the Establishment Clause was meant to be a restraint on the government. It's not directed toward individuals, which it's been used as a weapon to silence religious speech, but it's meant as a restraint on government in the same phrase as the free exercise of religion, which is meant to give the most robust religious protection for all faiths in our country.

Bishop Baron: That's helpful.

Chairman Patrick: Reverend Franklin, you mentioned the unions, and I was sitting here thinking that it really is a huge impact because we think of schools of education where our teachers come from, and so we also have to focus on those schools.

But today in Texas and it's pretty much this way across the country, more than half of our teachers do not come from higher education. They come from the private sector. People who are in their 30s and 40s and 50s who decide they want to become teachers. So obviously they're not, they haven't been indoctrinated by universities, some liberal campus somewhere. They're actually coming in wanting to teach. They've decided they want to do that as a career, and they are then being indoctrinated by the unions, and very often the school boards and the school administrators. Those are very powerful lobbies – the Texas Association of School Administrators, the Texas Association of School Boards - very, very powerful lobbies, and each state is different.

For example, in Florida you have a school district per county, roughly. I think there's 68 or 69 counties, so you deal with 69 superintendents. In Texas, we have over 1200 school districts, so that's 1200 superintendents and 5000 board members, and they have a tremendous political

influence in elections and all along the line. And most, most parents don't really understand what's going on, so we have to focus on higher education. Those unions are really key, so I'm glad you brought that up. Eric.

Commissioner Metaxas: In listening to many of these stories, it struck me that they sound like stories that you would hear from the former Soviet Union or Nazi Germany. Both places of which share a spiritually dark ideology, and not just, certainly none of, there's no such thing as neutrality. It's ultimately a God hating atheism. It's, it's demonic. It's spiritually very, very dark. And the idea that this has entered America, we all, we all have to say is staggering. It's a staggering thing that the long march through the institutions over the decades has succeeded to where we have an elite class that dares to think that they know better than parents. You know, even if you do know better than parents, shut up. You're not the parent. Parents have rights.

But the idea that that idea, that that has crept into American life because there was a time in American life where everyone understood parents, family that is sacred and you have no business. So the fact that through the sexual revolution which needs to be repealed, these bad ideas have entered, I remember in the mid 70's when I was in junior high school in Danbury, Connecticut, they introduced health class, and it's the same kind of thing. Why is some lesbian gym teacher going to talk to a mixed class about sexuality? It at the time I remember thinking, this is this is absurd. Why are we, we are supposed to be learning history and math and so forth, why do we have to go to a quote unquote health class to hear about this? So it has been, it's crept in over the decades that somehow the government in public schools has the right to talk to kids about stuff that they do not have the right to talk to about.

And so I think part of the recommendation has to be, and maybe this goes to Linda McMahon, but public schools have no business getting involved in any of this. They have no business. They never had any business talking to, to kids about issues that that are fundamentally spiritual, that deal with the human person. They just have no business doing that, and that, that, that these worldviews are very, very dark. Also, you know, the idea of being able to opt out, you know, you kind of have to think, how pathetic is it that we're like, could I please opt out? My goodness.

And Ryan said it, Doctor Anderson, you know, forget about us because most of us maybe come from healthy families where the damage can be undone. But what about these poor kids whose parents don't know any better and they send them to the public schools and they're being indoctrinated, which, which with ideas that are now long, no longer just bad ideas, but they're satanic? To talk to little children about these things is child abuse. It is horrific.

The idea that I mean, anybody, I speak as a Christian, you're supposed to care about the least of these. We're supposed to care not just about me and my family, but all the kids in America and all the families in America. They're trying to put food on the table. They send their kids to public school, they pay their taxes, and they're being indoctrinated with this some, in some cases, tremendously damaging information.

To hear young Shea have to be the the buffer between this little kid hearing about this sick stuff that no child should ever have to hear about. We, we in the American church ought to care about those folks, not just about our rights, but about the idea that kids are being indoctrinated with these very, very bad ideas.

And when you talk about the Establishment Clause, there is clearly now religion has been established among the secular cultural elites. It is a secular, dark religion. They don't call it a religion. They pretend that it's neutral. It is not neutral. And that worldview is being forced on children across America with our tax dollars. That is a violation of the Establishment Clause. It needs to be called what it is. It's the it's the imposition of a worldview which amounts to a religion.

And then I guess, finally, I want to say that what Doctor Phil said, that we are all combatants. The fact of the matter is that that that is right, and I hold churches and pastors most responsible. If you're going to a church that pretends like this is not our problem, we just want to preach the gospel, I say, by the grace of God, you need to get out of that church, because it is has been the abdication of the church in all of this, in disciplining its flock, that we are all to be combatants. We are all to get in the game. We're to care about our communities, and we ought to speak very strongly against this. Even if it doesn't affect my family, it's affecting other families and the timidity and in many cases, the cowardice of so-called Christians ultimately has led us to where we need a religious Commission on this, so there you have it.

Chairman Patrick: Witnesses, thank you, and members, we're a little behind, but this was a great discussion. We have another panel coming immediately right after.

Shea, I just want to tell you, I've been really fixated on your listening to, you listened to everyone else, not just give your testimony, and I could see you react to some of their testimony. You have soulful eyes, you have a soulful spirit, and I don't know what you're going to do as an adult, but you will be a great leader because you care and love people and you love God. Thank you. Paula, Paula?

Commissioner Pastor White: Thank you all so much. I can't over emphasize that. I'd just like us to consider, as a committee and Commission, here, to take a very holistic approach, perhaps as the parents and the community and the legal wheat, we focus a lot on the legal, and that's so important. But as a pastor for many years in a ministry for forty-two years, I'm thinking, what about the emotional support? I heard so many people say, "I'm lonely. I walk through this alone. What about the psychological, the trauma support?"

The problem is when we're dealing with it, if we get great laws, we've got to get rid of the unjust laws and policies and everything, right? We look at government at a whole being anti-religious. We know, Chairman Dan, that as we're looking at the grants that are going out of the government, they're 99% going to the wrong place. It's not a level playing field. People of faith are largely discriminated against, and unfortunately, faith has 80%, this fortunately, 80% and higher success in almost every program, while pure secular, has 20% and less. Don't we think Americans deserve

the best of everything? So if I could get like a list of, we all think we know what it took to walk through this, I just wrote down legal emotional support, trauma care, family stress. How many families break up under this kind of pressure? We lost our daughter to cancer. It put a tremendous stress on our family, oppressed, social media, security. There were so many things mentioned. If we look and say all these things were needed for me to get through this. You were the brave ones, the perseveres, the ones with the backbone to get through this. I think, how can we help in a holistic way, knowing every part of government, what needs to be touched?

Chairman Patrick: Thank you, pastor. Thank you. Let's give them a hand if we can. Thank you ma'am.

We're going to begin our last panel of the day. If you can take your seats, please.

Higher Education Perspectives

Alyza Lewin

Chairman Patrick: Alyza Lewin. Forgive me, I introduced you in the last panel, so my error. Can everybody be seated, please? You have the floor.

Ms. Lewin: Sorry for that confusion earlier.

Chairman Patrick: All on the chairman. Chairman takes all responsibility for mistakes.

Ms. Lewin: Well, Chairman Patrick and Commissioners, thank you for inviting me to appear here today. My name is Alyza Lewin, and I am President of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, a nonprofit legal advocacy organization that's headquartered here in Washington, D.C. whose mission is to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all.

In addition, I have a law practice together with my father, Nathan Lewin, where we have handled numerous religious liberty matters and where I had the privilege to argue the case of *Zivotofsky vs. Kerry* before the U.S. Supreme Court. That case, which involved the right of an American citizen born in Jerusalem to list Israel as the place of birth on his US passport, paved the way for President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and I'm honored to have been appointed by President Trump to serve on the legal advisory board of this Commission.

I've joined this panel to share with you how K- public schools are not immune from the severe spike in anti-Semitism afflicting this country. At the Brandeis Center, we hear almost every day from students and parents who have been targeted on the basis of their actual or perceived shared Jewish ancestry. For example, in Massachusetts, Jewish students were subjected to repeated bullying and harassment, including by students who gave Nazi salutes in the hallways, divided themselves into teams called Team Auschwitz and Team Hamas during athletic games. They drew swastikas on notebooks and on school property, and they used anti-Semitic slurs including, kike, dirty Jew, and go to the gas chamber.

At a public school in North Carolina, a middle school student who was not Jewish, but who wore an Israeli baseball jersey, team jersey to school one day and was thereafter perceived to be Jewish, for the next two years, his classmates persistently taunted and degraded him, referring to him as, quote, "dirty Jew" and "filthy Jew." They invoke classic anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews and money by calling the student, and I quote, "a penny picker upper," and they invoke the Holocaust by telling the student to, and these are quotes "get in a gas chamber, go back to your concentration camp, go to your oven, Jew, the oven is that way, and go die, Jew."

And in California, a six year old first grader at a public elementary school overheard older children on the playground say that Jews are stupid and then went home visibly distressed and told his parents that he wished he was not Jewish because people don't like Jews.

I was also reminded earlier when we heard the testimony of another client of the Brandeis Center, also in California, a high school Jewish Israeli high school student who was reprimanded after singing a song in Hebrew in her school's talent show. An administrator told her that she was, quote, "in big trouble" and that "there will be consequences because her song allegedly made students feel unsafe and uncomfortable." Never mind that other students at the talent show sung songs in other languages, including Spanish and Korean, and that the song that she sang was a love song, but the fact that she sang it in Hebrew, her native language, and the ancestral language of the Jewish people, the language of the Bible, made it something to reprimand and punish her, potentially punish her for.

So these are just a few of the many stories that the Brandeis Center has heard and included in complaints that we have filed on behalf of K- parents and students, and I should say that in both the Massachusetts and the North Carolina stories that I described, that bullying went on for a couple of years, and the school did nothing to address the anti-Semitism. And at the end, both students felt compelled to leave the schools and had to transfer to other schools.

This increased hostility towards Jews has not happened in a vacuum. It's facilitated by a deliberate, systematic effort to erase and deny the Jewish people's religious, cultural, ethnic and ancestral history in the Land of Israel. In a growing number of K-12 classes today, Jews and Israelis are portrayed as colonizers and oppressors, guilty of a litany of evils, but it's not possible to colonize a place that your ancestors are from. You cannot call Jews colonizers without first erasing the Bible and centuries of Jewish history.

There is a term for this, and it's called invasive anti-Semitism. This anti-Semitism ignores evidence of the Jewish people's ancient and continuous presence in the Land of Israel, including evidence exhibited here in the Museum of the Bible. A race of anti-Semitism erases and denies who Jews really are and creates a false, evil narrative in its place, indoctrinating students and the school community to hate Jews.

So how should we address this? Well, first, we must develop a zero tolerance for erasive anti-Semitism. We have to push back against those who rewrite history and deny the Jewish people's ancestral connection to their biblical homeland.

Second, we need to hold the bullies accountable. Far too often, schools seek to address the situation by removing the Jewish students from the hostile environment, rather than by ending the harassment that the Jewish students have endured. For example, schools have offered to take Jewish students out of a particular class, or arrange for private tutoring, or even permit a Jewish student to study from home. These, however, are not solutions because they isolate and ostracize the Jewish students while failing to address the underlying Jew hatred.

Third, we need to institute effective training to educate the school community to recognize contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism. We need to teach students, faculty and staff that it is never okay to demand that Jews disavow their history and heritage in order to be accepted.

We have seen the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping across college and university campuses, particularly in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023. If we want to turn that tide, we must ensure that our elementary, middle and high schools are not teaching our children to hate. We need to empower our students to recognize the myths and seek truth.

So let me close with a quote from the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, which includes the United Kingdom. Rabbi Sacks once noted when commenting on anti-Semitism that “irrational hate does not die.” But then he continued, and he added, and I quote, “but neither does the Jewish people, attacked so many times over the centuries. It still lives, giving testimony to the victory of the God of love over the myths and madness of hate.” Close quote. And so I suggest to you that Rabbi Sacks’s words sum up the task of this Commission and our task today, which is to help ensure the victory of the God of love over the myths and madness of hate. Thank you.

Chairman Patrick: Doctor Phil, Doctor Phil.

Commissioner Dr. Phil McGraw: Thank you so much for what you were saying. You probably know that I’m very focused on this. I’ve spent most of my life since I was 10 or 12 years old, focused on why people do what they do and don’t do what they don’t do. Probably pretty weird looking kid at the time for doing that at that age, but I’m really interested in what you think in this country, the motivation is behind this anti-Semitism. I know how it expresses itself. You just gave us horrific examples of it, but I’m curious what you think the motivation is that makes young people invest this kind of energy in this sort of thing against their, their Jewish contemporaries. What do you think is motivating this?

Ms. Lewin: So when it comes to, when it comes to the young children, I actually think when it comes to the young children, I think it’s part of what they are now being taught by the older people. But I, I think that the way anti-Semitism has historically worked is that whenever a society is unhealthy and it looks for someone to blame, the Jews become that scapegoat. And so I think that when you have an unhealthy society and that’s what’s happened now, again, the Jews have become the scapegoat.

Commissioner Dr. Phil McGraw: But why, why, why the Jews instead of some other group? Is it because of this hard work ethic and success that?

Ms. Lewin: I think that historically, it’s because the Jews have been the ones who’ve been courageous enough to maintain difference, and people suspect those who are different. And so throughout history, Jews, whether through their faith, through their religious practice, have not have been actually different from the rest of the of society, right? They have, they keep their own strict dietary rules. They’ll, they in some communities will dress a certain way. They have their Sabbath. Right, and so the Jews are different, and if the Jews are different, it’s always easier to scapegoat the group that’s different.

Commissioner Dr. Phil McGraw: So fear motivation.

Ms. Lewin: I think it's fear, and I think that what happens now is, I don't think I actually think that you have some who really do believe and engage in the Jew hatred, but you have an awful lot who are just kind of surrounded that group. And because of the way it's been messaged right to these students, as I say, there's this false narrative of what a Jew is and so these students are actually being taught that the Jews are evil. And so if the Jews are evil and you want utopia, you want a better world, then let's push the Jews out of society, and then we'll have that better world, because they're the ones making it bad, and that's the problem. They don't understand the truth, and they don't realize that what is being taught to them is an anti-Semitic stereotype and mischaracterization of who Jews really are.

Commissioner Dr. Phil McGraw: Because of late, it's oppressed and oppressor. Everybody's either oppressed or oppressor, and so they're cast in that light, but the fear of the difference and the unknown, that's helpful. Thank you. Thank you for that.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. Eric?

Commissioner Metaxas: I'm going to disagree. There are a lot of people that are different. It's not just the Jews are different. What makes the Jews particularly different and despised throughout history is because God loves the Jews, and the hatred of God focuses on the hatred of those whom He loves, so in history, that's been mostly Jews, also sincere, devout Christians. It is a spiritual issue.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you, thank you Eric. Miss Lewin, the reason this this rest of this panel is higher ed, but it was important to bring her because there's a sense in this country today that anti-Semitism is only at higher education. No, it's through K-12 through also, and Rabbi Soloveitchik, who is a member of our committee, couldn't be here today, but we are going to do a broader panel on anti-Semitism at one of our future hearings. So thank you for being here today. Let me go to Maggie. Do I say DeJong? Is that DeJong? All right. There you go.

Miss Maggie DeJong, Art Therapy Student

Miss DeJong: Thank you. Well good afternoon. Thank you so much to this Commission for holding this hearing and for all your work on religious liberty. I'm deeply grateful and very humbled to be here. I never expected that pursuing my dream to help hurting children would lead to a legal battle for most basic freedoms.

I graduated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with a master's in art therapy and counseling in May 2022. I chose this path because God gave me the passion to both fight for and preserve the innocence of children, especially those who experienced deep, complex trauma. Through art therapy, I witnessed how expressive means can calm both body and mind, and provide a mode of communication when oftentimes words are too difficult to even access. But while I was studying how to help others heal, I found myself betrayed by the very institution that was supposed to equip me for that mission.

My, my program was small. It was just 11 students, and we became very close. We would talk about being in each other's weddings and we cared for each other like family. But about a year in, something shifted. I came to Southern Illinois thinking that I was there to become a counselor, but I soon realized that the university expected me to adopt and promote a specific ideology, one rooted in Marxism and critical race theory.

When called on in class, I shared my perspective respectfully, asking whether these ideas served the best interest of our future clients. Instead of respectful dialog, my Christian and conservative beliefs were met with hostility, not only from classmates, but even the professors. But I didn't expect what came next.

The university issued three no contact orders against me, and if you're wondering what these are, so did I. Essentially, these are restraining orders and they apply to on and off campus. It meant that I couldn't talk to, sit near, or even be in the same coffee shop as these three students. I was shocked. I asked what I had done, and the university said that I hadn't violated any policy, but without any communication or investigation, I received a threat of disciplinary consequences if I violated the no contact orders, and they even copied university police officer on each order to drive this threat home.

After this, I stopped speaking in class. I was isolated and scared like I was in a relationship with abusers, trapped in a system that punished me for having different beliefs. I thought back through every conversation I'd had with these classmates. I couldn't think of anything that I'd done that could be taken as offensive, let alone aggressive, and I became afraid.

And with fear came a sense of powerlessness. I started having trouble sleeping. I lost my appetite, and I began to worry what might happen if my professors, who clearly disapproved of my views, decided to block me from graduating or finding a job. I reached out to ADF and they sent the demand letter to the university. Five days later, they rescinded, they rescinded the orders. Two weeks after that, they finally told me what my accusations were.

Three classmates had complained about some social media posts where I'd expressed my Christian and conservative views on current events. They claimed the mere expression of my views were microaggressions. One student said I was threatening because I couldn't embrace critical race theory, which I had said failed to treat people with dignity regardless of their race. She told the school I was threatening, even though in the same conversation I had with her, I praised her for having a beautiful heart and a deep compassion for children.

Sadly, even after the no contact orders were lifted, the attacks continued. The university officials refused to tell students that I hadn't broken any university policies. Instead, they emailed faculty, students and alumni, implying that I had engaged in oppressive acts and misconduct. The university held a community meeting where students publicly attacked my faith and accused me of being racist, oppressive, and creating a toxic learning environment.

But one of the most painful moments came when an art display titled *The Crushing Weight of Microaggressions* was displayed in our department. It featured a personal text I sent to a friend where I shared that even if we might disagree on some things, that I cared about her, but that my personal held beliefs were grounded in objective truth by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was heartbroken to see my words so misunderstood. I loved my classmates, including this girl, and to this day, I wish we could have shared our diverse beliefs with mutual respect and kindness. But that was sadly not my experience.

I wasn't punished for harming anyone. I was punished for having a different perspective, for being a Christian and for asking honest questions. At a public university, which is supposed to be a marketplace of ideas, I was silenced for mine. I knew I couldn't just walk away.

I live by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's quote "silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak, and not to act is to act." I could not be silent, knowing that what happened to me could happen to future students. Our freedoms are too precious not to defend.

So I filed a lawsuit, but what weighs on my heart to this day is I should have never had to sue. Public universities have a duty to protect open dialog, not punish it. They should welcome differences, not erase them, and no student should be shamed or silenced for their faith. Looking back, I can see how what was meant to break me, God used to shape me. Through the fear and betrayal, He gave me the courage to speak even when my voice shook and He taught me to love even those who misunderstood or maligned me.

I'm so grateful to President Trump and this Commission for your bold work to protect our First Amendment freedoms, freedoms that belong to all of us, regardless of faith, race, or creed. The truth is, freedom is fragile. Silence is costly, but courage is contagious, and I want to thank you all for being so courageous.

Norvillia Etienne Cain

Chairman Patrick: Our next witness is Norvillia Cain.

Ms. Cain: Thank you all for the opportunity to speak here today. I am truly honored to be with you. Proverbs says that the tongue has the power of life and death, but that's not just a verse from the Bible. It's my story. Words saved my life.

When I was 16, I learned just how close I came to never being born. My mother was 17 when she found out she was pregnant with me. Already raising my brother alone, she was scared and overwhelmed. She felt she had no choice but to end my life through abortion, but God intervened through the voice of my grandmother. She empowered my mother to know she wasn't alone. Because of my grandmother's faith and my mother's yes, to my life. I am alive and incredibly privileged to speak to you today.

My family's story ignited a passion in me to empower other young women, and instilled in me a desire to use my story to share God's truth: that every person is created in the image of God and has intrinsic dignity. From the moment of conception, God opened the door for me to share this truth during my studies at Queens College in New York, by inspiring me to start our very own students for life group. I knew God was calling me to be that voice, to walk alongside young women facing what my mother faced so they would know "you are not alone. There is hope. You can choose motherhood and live a fulfilling life."

My college campus became my mission field. With the help of Students for Life of America, several classmates and I began the process of forming an official club to support pregnant women and parenting students on campus by providing resources, baby showers, scholarships, and community. To my dismay, we faced opposition at every turn.

The Student Development Office discouraged us from even applying, but we persevered and carefully crafted a constitution and submitted our application. When we met with the Campus Affairs Committee, we shared that we wanted our club to promote women's health, offer support to pregnant women and parenting students, and cultivate a community that celebrates the dignity of every life.

After cutting our presentation short, the committee said we'd hear back by the end of the day. We did not. A week passed, other student groups were approved and we heard nothing. Finally, I reached out to the head of the student development office and without explanation, she told me that the college would not be recognizing us as a student group.

I was stunned. This meant no meeting spaces, no access to campus resources, no student activity funds, which our tuition helped pay for and no ability to host speakers and freely dialog on campus.

Public universities are supposed to be places where all students are free to share their beliefs, opinions, and worldviews. Queens College approved a wide variety of student groups every year, including pro-abortion groups. It was hard experiencing such blatant discrimination against living

out my Catholic faith. Queens College wasn't just silencing our student group, they were silencing help and hope for pregnant women. They were silencing our voice.

As I considered what to do, I remembered the circumstances that surrounded the dawn of my life. I recalled the difference my grandmother's encouraging voice made for my scared mother, and I knew I had no choice but to speak up for women and their unborn children.

So, with the help of Alliance Defending Freedom, I filed a lawsuit against Queens College not out of anger, but out of a conviction that every student deserves the right to speak, to serve, and to stand for what they believe. It wasn't easy being a college student taking on my alma mater, but the incredible gift of life is worth standing for.

Eventually, Queens College changed its policy and officially recognized our club. When I graduated, our group was changing lives, and we had even launched a scholarship fund for pregnant women and new parents. This scholarship fund has now become its own foundation, the Kathleen Mullally Foundation, run by the young woman who succeeded me as president. Today, all across New York State, many women have been awarded funds to help care for themselves and their families while maintaining their studies. It stands as a beacon of hope that every life has inherent dignity, and that women deserve better than abortion.

I pray that my story will inspire college students to courageously live out their faith, and I hope that President Trump and this administration will continue their bold efforts to protect free speech and religious freedom at college campuses across our country. We know that words have the power to end a life, but they also have the power to save one. And it is up to us to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Thank you for the blessing of speaking here today.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. Sir, you're going to have to help me get your name just right. All right?

Mr. Uzuegbunam: Yes.

Chairman Patrick: Would you please introduce yourself?

Mr. Uzuegbunam: It's Chike. And the last? The long one is Uzuegbunam.

Chairman Patrick: I thought it was Chike, but I wasn't sure if I could say Chike, go ahead, so there we go.

Chike Uzuegbunam, Student, Georgia Gwinnett University

Mr. Uzuegbunam: No worries. I first want to thank Almighty God and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen, for the goodness of making all of this possible. I appreciate the opportunity to share my story with you guys this afternoon, and for those, for each of you, in doing what is right to protect religious liberty.

As a child, my parents often spoke of the great freedoms America offers. These freedoms and the opportunities that they provide are why my parents moved here from Nigeria. They taught us that freedom is a precious gift, one to be protected at all costs. That's why I'm here today.

In 2013, I enrolled in Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. It was during my time there that I embraced Christianity, a decision that brought me profound joy, and I felt compelled to share it with others. I'm convicted that this message is the greatest message that we could ever hear, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I know that "sinners" is not a politically correct term, but without sin, there is no need for a Savior.

I was captivated by the glorious message of the cross of Jesus Christ, and His ultimate sacrifice for humanity's redemption. My campus offered plenty of opportunities for this. Students were often out in public areas, sharing their public views and advocating for causes or handing out literature on topics that were important to them. I did the same, respectfully speaking about my faith with interested students. It was a chance to meet new people and share how Jesus had changed my life.

But one day in 2016, a college administrator approached me and told me to stop. He said if I wanted to share my faith with those who stopped by, I need to reserve one of the schools to quote unquote, speech zones. And these zones made up 0.001%, hold on, 0.0015 .% of the campus, about the size of a sheet of paper on a football field, and they were only open 10% of the week.

But still, I honored the policy. I made my reservation, showed up on time, and began sharing my faith, but within a few minutes, campus police stopped me again. They said someone had complained under the college's speech code and I had to stop or face disciplinary action. I was surprised and confused. Here I was in the free speech zone, quote unquote, following all of the rules, and yet officials silenced me.

At this moment, I realized I could not speak outside of the speech zones, or I cannot, and I cannot speak in them either. I contacted Alliance Defending Freedom and learned that my experience sadly wasn't unique. Many public colleges and universities use similar speech zones and speech code to silence students in violation of their constitutionally protected freedoms.

I was deeply concerned. I thought back to the stories my parents told me about the unique freedoms that United States offers, the promise that every American is free to speak without fear of government censorship. I knew I had a small part to play in preserving this legacy of freedom, so I made the tough decision to sue Georgia Gwinnett.

The college first said that my speech sharing the words of scripture i.e. qualified as quote unquote “fighting words” and therefore wasn’t protected by the First Amendment. Later, the school switched its strategies and tried to avoid accountability altogether. It revised its speech policies and asked the court to dismiss my case, insisting that it should no longer be held accountable for silencing me.

Even though the college had censored me under its previous policies, both the District Court and the 11th Circuit said that the college could escape accountability simply by changing its policy after the fact. “Justice delayed is justice denied” suddenly took on a new meaning for me. If the government officials can violate our rights and then walk away with no consequences, the Constitution is an empty promise, and I knew that that wasn’t the legacy I wanted for my future kids.

So I persevered to make sure no other student on any other campus would be silenced by school officials for sharing their faith. My, my case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and Georgia Gwinnett actions were so troubling that people from diverse political, religious backgrounds Christians, Muslims, Jewish, Jews, atheists, liberals, conservatives, all of them alike supported my case and the right to speak freely was at risk. Thankfully, in a resounding to decision, the Supreme Court ruled that public university officials must be held accountable when they violate someone’s constitutional rights.

And for me, this victory was deeply personal. When I heard the court’s decision, I thanked my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I also thought of my parents and how they believed the promise of this country, and how they sacrificed for us to grow up with this freedom.

But we still have work to do. Many students today feel the pressure to remain silent about their faith. Many are afraid of being labeled, canceled, or punished simply for speaking the truth and love. That’s not the America that I want for my two kids, which is why I’m so grateful that President Trump and this Commission is working to. to preserve our cherished freedoms.

Free speech should not depend on the popularity of your views. Religious liberty should not be confined to zones, and the First Amendment does not end where a college campus begins. Almost 250 years ago, our Founders declared that our freedoms come not from the government, but from God, and that government exists to protect those freedoms and not restrict them. That’s the America that I came to. That’s the America that I love, and that’s the America that I want to help preserve. Thank you for the privilege of speaking today.

Chairman Patrick: Doctor Phil? Another combatant, yes general of combatants and Reverend Graham, another soldier, another soldier for you. Chike, we will not forget your passion, your voice, or your name ever again. All right? Okay. Any comments or questions? We’ll go to our last witness of the day, Kimberly Colby.

Kimberlee Colby

Ms. Colby: Oh, following those people. Thank you Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Commissioners for having these hearings on troubling but extremely important issues.

For four decades at Christian Legal Society, or CLS, as it's called, I've worked to protect religious students' right to meet for prayer and Bible study on their campuses, just like other student groups meet. CLS student chapters, meet at law schools nationwide. All students of any faith or no faith are welcome at CLS meetings, and like many other faith groups, CLS chapters require their leaders to agree with their religious beliefs.

Colleges allow hundreds of student groups to meet as recognized student groups for all kinds of speech, as Norvillia was explaining. Recognition allows a student group to reserve empty classrooms for free, to communicate with other students through the college website, and to apply for student fee, sorry, student fee funding.

In the late 1970s, college administrators began to discriminate against religious student groups, claiming that allowing a student Bible study to use an empty classrooms' heat and light violated the Establishment Clause. In 1981, the Supreme Court rejected this notion, instead ruling that freedom of speech protected religious groups right to meet. It reaffirmed this right in 1995, and Congress protected high school groups in 1984. That should have been the end of discrimination against religious student groups, but deprived of the Establishment Clause as an excuse for nondiscrimination, for excluding religious groups, some college administrators turned to their school's nondiscrimination policy.

Administrators claim that it is religious discrimination for a religious group to require its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs, but it is common sense and basic religious freedom for a religious group to want the leaders of its Bible studies and prayers to agree with its religious beliefs.

I want to share two recent examples of this problem, one from Iowa and one from California. In 2017, a student group at the University of Iowa called Business Leaders in Christ, or BLINK, interviewed potential leaders. One candidate disagreed with BLINK's religious beliefs. He was welcomed to remain a member, but not a leader. In response, the student formed his own religious group. That's good. The university recognized his group. Again, that's good, but then the student filed a discrimination complaint against BLINK, and the university took away BLINK's recognition.

The university then launched an inquisition into other religious groups on campus. When two groups sought court protection, the university informed the court it would derecognize 32 religious student groups if it won. Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Baha'i and Christian student groups all would be excluded from campus. The student groups won, but only after four years of negotiation and litigation.

Turning to California, a student group called Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or FCA, had met at Pioneer High School in San Jose, California for over a decade. FCA student leaders, but not members, are required to agree with FCA's religious beliefs.

In April 2019, a teacher posted FCA's religious beliefs regarding marriage and sexuality on his classroom whiteboard. Next to FCA's beliefs he wrote, and I'm quoting, "I'm deeply saddened that a club on Pioneer's campus asks its members to affirm these statements. How do you feel?" End quote. The two FCA student leaders sitting in his class felt deeply hurt to see FCA's religious beliefs disparaged by their teacher in front of their class.

The school climate committee decided that FCA's beliefs clashed with the school's values of inclusiveness and open mindedness. The school revoked FCA's recognition. In other words, inclusiveness requires exclusion. When FCA students again sought recognition, the request was denied on the same day that the school recognized the Satanic Temple Club.

FCA students continue to meet unofficially, but student protesters and the school newspaper disrupted their meetings. The harassment made the FCA leaders dread going to school. A district court sided with the school district, but on appeal, the FCA students won. Again. it had taken four years to regain recognition.

I want to finish with a third case. In 2010, in *CLS v Martinez*, a closely divided five-four Supreme Court sidestepped the issue whether a nondiscrimination policy could be used this way to exclude religious student groups from a law school campus. The court focused solely on an all-comers policy, not the nondiscrimination policy. The all-comers policy had first appeared during litigation.

The school claimed that no student, excuse me, no student group could have belief-based leadership requirements. Justices, Justice Ginsburg, joined by Justices Stevens, Kennedy, Breyer, and Sotomayor, wrote that an all-comers policy was constitutionally permissible, but only if it were uniformly deprived, only if it uniformly deprived all student groups of the right to choose their leaders.

Justice Alito, with Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Scalia and Thomas dissented. Neither a nondiscrimination policy nor an all-comers policy, they explained, could override a religious groups' right to choose its leaders.

Martinez conflicts with past free speech law and current free exercise jurisprudence, and but its confusion is creating great harm for religious students on campuses both at college and high school. Our democracy depends on schools teaching and modeling the essential lesson that the First Amendment protects everyone's free speech and religious beliefs, especially the speech and beliefs of those with whom we disagree. Excluding a religious student group because of its religious beliefs is precisely the wrong lesson for educators to teach the students.

Chairman Patrick: Thank you. Kelly?

Commissioner Mr. Shackelford: Kim, it's great to see you. It's been a long time. I wonder if you have any recommendations of something we could do? Not. And even if you don't, I would love to hear from you later because I consider you a bright legal mind for many years, and I'd love it on what you addressed. But then also, maybe this will you can think about this. A big problem we've started to address that's come up like Kay's case and other people's courts create all these gimmicks to avoid deciding the issue, and that is a huge harm to religious freedom. We understand human beings would rather avoid difficult decisions. And so, I'd love ideas on that as well. Again, you might not have an answer on that today. But I'd love any answers you might have on *CLS v. Martinez* or any of these other decisions where these religious clubs are clearly being discriminated against.

Ms. Colby: Well, a big one is that—soon there will be introduced as piece of legislation into Congress by Sen. Lankford and Sen. Tim Scott and Chairman Walberg—that would do for college students what the Equal Access Act in 1984 did for high school students. I was part of that effort, and at the time, we thought the college student problem was solved. And so, we just were approaching the high school problem, but now, we need to circle back and provide federal legislation to protect the college students. It's called the Equal Campus Access Act.

A second thing, and maybe this is more inside baseball, but the Department of Justice, especially the Solicitor General, needs to take every opportunity to seek the overruling of *CLS v. Martinez*. It's a narrow decision. You can get around it often by telling colleges you can only exclude the religious groups if you also exclude the sororities and fraternities because they are allowed to discriminate in their leadership and membership on the basis of sex. And they usually back off then. But they don't always. And it causes a lot of—a lot of—unnecessary conflict on campus to have *Martinez* there. And *Martinez* partly rested on *Employment Division v. Smith*, which I know the commission has heard repeatedly needs to be overruled. I heard someone mention the Clinton Administration Guidelines, which had been revised in Bush II, revised in the first Trump Administration and again Biden—and probably need to go back to some Trump Administration guidance there. But, you know, I've been listening today... I almost think we're at a point that somehow that school superintendents need to understand that in orientation for teachers they need to make very clear to their teachers what their guidance says because much of it is very helpful and is very stable since the Clinton Administration, quite honestly. It's gotten better in some ways, but religious speech should not be excluded from campuses. And one of the things I didn't go into with the University of Iowa case is the administrators there were actually held personally liable for the costs of the students, and I think that happened also in the FCA case. I think if teachers, even the hostile ones, understood they might need to pay out of their pocket that would be a helpful thing for them to know. A lot of these teachers are working very hard. They're good people. They just get things wrong. But there is a lot of hostility that could be addressed if they were educated every year at the beginning of the school year.

Chairman Patrick: Members, that's our last witness. We said we would wrap between 3:15 and 3:30 PM, and as Chair, it's my job to get the train to the station on time for the benefit of those

who travel and come as well. So, I want to thank all the witnesses for the day, thank this panel, and Rev. Graham, you're going to close us with a prayer. You know, members, our first hearing was terrific. This topped the first hearing because we really saw the impact to the people that we want to protect, and I think this really underscores we all didn't quite know maybe what we were in for when we started. This is serious business for the country, and serious business for the families and individuals. Rev. Graham, please close.

Commissioner Rev. Graham: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the time you have given us today to hear from these witnesses, their stories, their struggles, their fights to live out their freedom. Their religious freedoms. And so, Father, we pray that—this commission—you'll use us to hear and to learn and to be able to give counsel to our President that he can do something about it. And blah, Father, I believe he can. Father, I believe you've raised up for such an hour as this, so Father we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on a cross for our sins, whom you raised to life. And Father, we thank you. We thank you. We thank you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.