



Ethical Action Report



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Religious Freedom: Sign the First Freedom First Petition

There are few freedoms so enshrined in America’s political tradition as separation of church and state. The framers of the U.S. Constitution understood that a healthy wall between government and religion protects both institutions against corruption from the other. But in recent years our nation has seen the Jeffersonian wall slowly erode with such government programs as the Faith-Based Initiative, legislation such as the Public Expression of Religion Act, and the endorsement of political candidates by houses of worship.

BACKGROUND

Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Interfaith Alliance Foundation have joined together to create a petition to raise awareness about the importance of church-state separation and protecting religious liberty. The project's centerpiece is a petition in support of our constitutional right to make personal choices about what we believe.

The petition appeals to elected officials to affirm their dedication to the following principles:

- Every American should have the right to make personal decisions – about family life, reproductive health, end of life care, and other matters of personal conscience.
- American tax dollars should not go to charities that discriminate in hiring based on religious belief or that promote a particular religious faith as a requirement for receiving services.
- Political candidates should not be endorsed or opposed by houses of worship.
- Public schools should teach with academic integrity and without the promotion of religious preference or belief.
- Decisions about scientific and health policies should be based on the best available scientific data, not on religious doctrine.

ACTION

Stand up for religious freedom – both freedom *of* and *from* – by signing the Americans United petition: <http://www.firstfreedomfirst.org/>.

Freedom of Speech: Protect Free Expression on the Internet

Since its inception, the Internet has been heralded as a beacon for democracy and free speech. Proponents were hopeful that in countries such as China, where dictators rule and political dissenters are persecuted, the alluring force of the Internet would be too powerful to quash and thus freedom would reign.

Sadly, this has not been the case. Some household-name IT companies have been complicit in helping tyrannical governments crack down on freedom of expression on the Internet.

BACKGROUND

Early in 2006, Google launched a Chinese version of its search engine, Google.cn. This version of Google's popular search engine is self-censored and restricts search results for key words such as "human rights," "political reform," and "Tiananmen Square," among others.

The chief executive of Google argued that censorship was unavoidable in the Chinese market, where the government restricts free speech. However, Google is acting contrary to their previous pledge not to censor results for any search term, a statement that was displayed on their Support Center website. Since the launch of Google.cn, this statement has been removed.

Yahoo! also self-censors its search engine. Moreover, disturbingly, it has been involved in revealing the identities of private users to Chinese authorities, who dealt heavy sentences

to four political dissenters: Shi Tao, Li Zhi, Jiang Lijun, and Wang Xiaoning. It came under fire from several human rights organizations for this decision, including Human Rights Watch.

This November government and company leaders from across the globe will meet at United Nations headquarters to discuss the future of the Internet. Amnesty International, with the support of the *Observer* newspaper in the United Kingdom, is leading an effort to show that, online or offline, the human voice and human rights are impossible to repress. Help them send a clear message that people everywhere believe the Internet should be a force for political freedom, not repression.

ACTION

Sign Amnesty International's pledge to demand freedom of information and expression on the Internet at <http://irrepressible.info/pledge>.

Stand up for Peace: Demand that Congress Develop a Comprehensive Plan to End the War in Iraq

The situation in Iraq has gone from bad to worse. The number of Iraqi citizens who have died since US invasion is near 50,000 and the country is on the brink of a civil war. America's reputation in the world has been severely damaged as scandals such as treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and the atrocity of Haditha have come to light. Moreover, according to a recent National Intelligence Estimate report, our efforts in Iraq may be fueling terrorism. It is time to demand that our troops come home.

BACKGROUND

The Declaration of Peace Coalition is calling for Congress to immediately and peacefully bring the troops home from Iraq. In addition, it supports an Iraqi-led peace process, including a peace conference to shape a post-occupation transition, and an international peacekeeping presence. It also calls for the return of Iraqi control over its oil resources and its political and economic life and the establishment of a "peace dividend" for vital social needs.

It is time to admit that our continued presence in Iraq will only exacerbate problems and there is a growing urgency to end the war to mitigate the damage done to Iraq, the region, and to the world.

ACTION

Call your congresspeople and demand an exit strategy for Iraq now! Also visit the Declaration of Peace website to learn more about how you can help: www.declarationofpeace.org.

Reproductive Freedom: Urge your Representative to Support the "Reducing the Need for Abortions and Supporting Parents Act" (HR 6067)

There are few political and cultural issues as divisive as abortion rights. Since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in the early 1970's questions as to the reach and application of the

precedent have been fiercely debated. However, regardless of how one feels about the right to have an abortion, most everyone can agree that reducing the *need* for abortions should be a priority.

BACKGROUND

Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) have introduced important legislation that will address this issue. The bill's aim is twofold. First, it will arm teens and adults with the tools they need to avoid unwanted pregnancy by promoting contraception use, providing comprehensive sex education, and offering other proven methods to reduce teen pregnancies. Second, it will make the choice to carry a pregnancy to term easier for women by providing services for pregnant women and assisting new parents by providing funding for day-care programs.

This legislation, if passed, may cut the abortion rate in the United States by 95 percent. But it needs your help in order to get that far. A group of radical anti-choicers in Congress are doing everything they can to stall the bill. Their reasons? They insist that insurance providers shouldn't have to cover contraception, which they irrationally believe causes spontaneous abortions.

If we are serious about reducing the need for abortion we cannot back down on the availability of contraception issue. Social conservatives are worried that wider access to contraceptives will increase the number of people having premarital sex. And while this is true to some extent, the proven dramatic *decrease* in unwanted pregnancies due to wider contraception use utterly overwhelms the minor increase due to more premarital sex. So it's time to make social conservatives do the math and then face the fact that the best way to reduce the need for abortion is to allow them the choice of having *safer* sex.

ACTION

Call your representative today and urge them to vote yes on HR 6067, which will dramatically reduce the need for abortion.

Contacting Elected Officials

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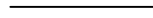
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Visit <http://www.senate.gov> or
<http://www.house.gov> to use your
representatives' e-mail contact forms.

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