

Speaker 1:

Welcome to News and Focus with your host, Chris Long, president of the Ohio Christian Alliance. Stay tuned for an analysis and conversation about the issues that matter most to you and your family. Here now with this week's edition of News and Focus is Chris Long.

Chris Long:

Good afternoon, and welcome to this edition of News and Focus. We're glad that you've joined us. With us on the program today is Attorney General Dave Yost for the state of Ohio. We're going to be talking about some important issues. You'll want to stay tuned. Of course, this last week we talked about the attack that took place at a Catholic cathedral in downtown Columbus. Unfortunately, religious liberty is under attack as these attacks at churches are unfortunately on the increase. But this attack at this Catholic cathedral, actually it happened on January 22nd, the anniversary of Roe V Wade.

Chris Long:

The Catholic cathedral was holding a mass, a memorial service for the unborn as they annually do, but this year it was targeted by an abortionist extremist group that charged into the service with signs, bullhorns, shoutings, and profanities and charged the altar where the priest was delivering the message. And it was very unsettling to the congregants and then the security guard then recomposed himself and was able to get them to exit the building. The police did come. We'll talk about that in a minute, the Columbus police, but there was no charges that were filed nor citations given that day. We'll talk about that, but here's a little audio clip that was in the Columbus Dispatch as they reported on the incident as well.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:02:06]

Chris Long:

Well, that doesn't sound like a church service, but that's what happened when this riotous group barged into the doors of the cathedral and then began to do these chantings and profanities and shoutings, disrupting the mass that was in progress. With us on the phone is State Attorney General, Dave Yost. And he has some thoughts on this. So welcome to the program, Mr. Attorney General.

AG Dave Yost:

Chris, it's always a blessing to be with you.

Chris Long:

Thank you for your service to our state, we appreciate that very much. Obviously you're a resident of Columbus and actually this took place just a few blocks from your offices in downtown Columbus. Tell us what your thoughts are about what happened on January 22nd at the St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral.

AG Dave Yost:

Well, I'm just appalled. My heart goes out to the congregants who were there, and I actually feel kind of bad for the protesters because there's something very twisted in their hearts that they weren't able to recognize the American value of allowing free worship and they wanted to disrupt something that was sacred to the people that were there. But it's a sign of the times, I'm afraid, and the growing intolerance

for Christian viewpoints in the public marketplace. You and I've talked over the years about this slowly developing, but now accelerating trend. And I think that it's time that we need to move now rather than later, to protect religious freedom.

Chris Long:

Well, that's right. And of course the Catholic priests and bishops, actually it is the headquarters of the diocese of central Ohio. So the bishop actually was, two bishops were in attendance at the service as well as the attending priest. And certainly some of the congregants talking with the church leadership, understanding of turning the other cheek, of praying for enemies. But the Bible also equally speaks about the civil authority. And that Paul says in the epistles that the police really don't carry the sword in vain, that they execute judgment on those who are evildoers. This is what it says in the epistles. So we do say, have this balance. And so what we are saying to the church leaders and saying, look, we understand your Christian position of loving your enemies and turning the other cheek, but in this instance where there's been a serious violation of first amendment practice in our country, and by the way, we've not seen this before.

Chris Long:

This is, the Ohio Christian Alliance, as a public policy, religious liberty advocacy organization. David, I have to tell you, we've never seen anything like this in the 20 years I've been on this post. So this is a new watershed moment and an alarming one at that. We are hearing, getting reports of other attacks and disturbances at churches and not all the time do the neither of the congregants or the church leadership talk about them, but now they're becoming more and more in the news. So that's how we're beginning to collect these things. But this is important because we believe that actual, not just trespass laws and violent entry was broken here, but there are possibly federal laws. And I know there's research about that right now and there are some attorneys talking to congregants about filing a federal lawsuit.

Chris Long:

And oddly enough, they're quoting a law that was passed back in 1996, I believe, when President Bill Clinton was in office. And when there was non-resistance opposing of abortion with Operation Rescue sitting in abortion entries and blocking girls from going in. They didn't do anything violent, but it was like a sit-in type thing. The abortion industry was furious about it. So they pushed members of Congress. They passed a law and it's called FACE, F-A-C-E, and it has to do about protecting clinics. Oddly enough, there's a provision in that federal law that says that neither can that be a disruption of worship or church services. So these folks who actually are advocating for advancement of abortion may actually find themselves on the wrong side of the law with the very law that would protect clinics they violated by intruding and riotously entering this worship service and violating these people's first amendment. Your thoughts on that?

AG Dave Yost:

Well, it's certainly ironic, isn't it, that the federal legislation that originally was designed to protect access to abortion clinics might be the law that allows us to go to court. It's important to realize that this law started out as an abortion clinic law and Senator Orrin Hatch at that time said, well, if you're going to do this and you want any Republican votes, you need to treat churches as well, at least as good as abortion clinics. It seems like it should go without saying. The law allows, as you implied, the state attorney general to go to court, not to prosecute, but to seek an injunction, which is basically a court order, restraining somebody and potentially a civil fine to deter and punish the conduct. We've been

working on this law, tearing apart and reading the case law for the last several days. And it's written in a way that makes it a little difficult to use, which is probably why, since it's been passed, no one has ever, no attorney general has ever prosecuted a case under it. We're looking at the facts underneath it and hoping that we may be able to be the first here in Ohio.

Chris Long:

We're talking with Attorney General of the state of Ohio, David Yost. And David, we appreciate your service. I was also glad to when I contacted your office and talked to some of your staff about this church attack, that I was informed that your team was already in discussion and was concerned about the incident. So I was very heartened by that, not having to bring the issue to you, but that you were already reviewing this issue and it was on your radar, so we were very encouraged by that. The other matter here is that on the day of the event and the disturbance, the Columbus police did come, they talked to the protestors. I guess we call them that at this point, that came outside and none of them had ID with them, but they have been ID'd because they're on Facebook.

Chris Long:

A Facebook page actually organized this event. So that's being looked into because this protest that interrupted this church service was organized on Facebook. And in fact, the group has said that they're going to go back. Now, last weekend, the big snow storm came. It was very cold and the weather was terrible and maybe that's what kept them away, thankfully, but the church is bracing for them coming back because they have said that they're coming back. Now, the church has recruited additional security, the Columbus police have been informed. But the Columbus police these days, David, it's a much different situation. I mean, talking to law enforcement in the city and citizens in the city, there is a non-interactive type approach on these kinds of issues with the Columbus police. Meaning, in fact, I'm told even with some egregious crimes, they're just handing out citations and releasing people at the scene. These people didn't even receive a citation, no charges, no arrests, and no citation. What do you make of that?

AG Dave Yost:

Well, part of what's driving this is COVID. The jail, they're trying to reserve the jail beds for the most violent offenders because they have to have the density lower in the county jails. Part of it is political leadership and how they want to see the city policed. And since I'm not in that chain of command, I have to respect the leaders that community elected to lead. But I will say this in a general sense, when we don't enforce a law, we ought to seriously consider getting rid of it. An unenforced law is no law at all. And when you fail to enforce the law, you bring disregard, skepticism on all laws and make the potential, or reduce the obedience to all laws you keep in it by knowing that it's being violated and they are doing nothing.

AG Dave Yost:

Now, it's very possible, I think, even likely that we have to daggum many laws on the books, and if we can't enforce them, we ought to get rid of. But this goes back to the first amendment, the founding of our country, the reason the pilgrims came across the ocean on that dangerous voyage to be able to worship freely. If we're going to scrap that, if we're going to fail to protect by operation of law, the whole reason there is an America, I think we have entered a very dangerous time.

Chris Long:

We're talking with David Yost, the Attorney General for the state of Ohio. We're talking about the church attack in downtown Columbus at St. Joseph's Cathedral. David, this is a historic church. It is the marquee church of the Diocese of Central Ohio. It is certainly gained the attention of Catholics and the faithful from around the state of Ohio. At this point, that the Columbus police and the city law director have done nothing is not acceptable. In fact, our office has called Mayor Ginter and we've talked to Zack Klein. I mean, we've left messages at their offices. Nobody's answering the phones. But we have left detailed official messages asking for them to contact us about this incident, and I've asked the Columbus Right to Life and other church officials. There's been no response from the mayor's office or the city law director's office.

Chris Long:

No arrests were made, no citations were given. I mean, when you do that, you encourage more violence and it just gets worse and worse. We're talking about a city right now that is the murder capital of the state. They have more murders than any other large city in the state, and it's only getting worse. So, this is an unacceptable situation. The problem is that it hosts our state government. And it's been the scene of the May 28th riots, the June 19th, defacing of the State House, lots of incidences throughout the year. Our good man, Ronald Bryan, the county prosecutor, unfortunately lost his race. He served 24 years. He was actually pursuing charges and indictments against those who committed some very serious crimes. It is anyone's guess now as to whether those charges may not be pursued by the new County prosecutor. We hope that's not the case, but it seems as if this is the trend. I don't understand it, David. Where are we heading with all this? And it's a spirit of lawlessness.

AG Dave Yost:

I don't really have anything to add. I mean, we've covered this ground. You've simply got stand up for the rule of law. And that means the same rules for everybody. That means whether you're storming the castle or storming St. Joe's Cathedral or storming the State House, same laws, same rules for everybody. And I think that one of the things that we do need, if there were charges to be brought, they would be very low level misdemeanors here in Ohio. We don't have a law that protects against the disruption of a religious service in Ohio. You know who does? California, of all places on the left coast. They have a criminal statute that says you're not allowed to disrupt a church service and it's punishable by up to a year in jail and a thousand dollar fine.

AG Dave Yost:

I've had some conversations with members of the General Assembly here in Ohio and suggested to them that we might, for once, want to import a law from California, because I just don't think a simple trespass or a disruption of the lawful meeting, both of which are our fourth degree misdemeanors, I believe, is adequate for this. I'll just share a quick story, if I may.

Chris Long:

Sure, please.

AG Dave Yost:

After this occurred, I called Bishop Brennan to express my concern and my support for his congregation and the diocese. He has only been in Columbus for a couple of years, he actually came from Long Island out in New York. And he told me he was just delivering the homily, which for those of you listeners who are not Catholic, it's kind of in the middle of the Catholic liturgy [inaudible 00:17:12]. And they burst into

the cathedral and stormed the altar chanting, and you heard the audio. He told me his mind flashed back to his time in Long Island, because he had been celebrating a mass when a gunman disrupted the mass when he was out there. And of course he didn't know what was going on, whether these people who are acting very aggressively were armed or had incendiary devices, or what. He had no clue what was going to happen. And I can only imagine what it must've been like for him having had that experience of a gunman bursting into a holy place, and then seeing this happen. This is something that oughtn't be allowed to go unpunished in the United States of America.

Chris Long:

Well, thank you, Mr. Attorney General. We appreciate that. And I know that members of the legislature are considering legislation to pass. I know that congregants of St. Joseph's Cathedral are considering filing lawsuits, even if the diocese chooses not to. Certainly, as you said, the Columbus police could issue citations of some vandalism, forced entry, or a trespass or disturbing the peace. But like you said, these are misdemeanors at a minimum. And I'm kind of quite surprised that they didn't hand out any citations, but again, that's the way things have gone in Columbus this year.

Chris Long:

Now, I'd like to turn the corner just a little bit, because there is of course disturbing things that are coming out of Washington. The election is over, Mr. Biden won the presidency. The Democrats control both chambers, both the House and the Senate and we're seeing executive orders. In fact, an inordinate amount of executive orders pour out from the new administration. And one of them that has peaked and concerns of people is the advancing transgender policy, even in public schools. So in federal policy, the LGBTQ or transgender policy, even in public schools, which would allow boys to use girls bathrooms, showers, locker rooms, and even athletic programs. What my question is and on the minds of many, where does the privacy rights of women and children begin and when does it end with this new policy coming out of Washington? And what is your thoughts about that?

AG Dave Yost:

Well, to start with, as you pointed out, there have been a record number of executive orders issued in the first week or 10 days of this administration. My staff is reviewing them because they touch on everything from the subject you mentioned through energy policy and just tons of stuff. We are preparing to hold the administration accountable where they didn't do what they ought to do in these situations. You might recall that the Democrats took all the way to the Supreme Court the executive order that President Trump issued on DACA and the Supreme Court in that case said, if you want to eliminate an executive order from the prior administration, you have to go all the way through the administrative procedures act, do the cost benefit analysis, jump through all the hoops first. Well, they clearly didn't have anything like that with this raft of executive orders.

AG Dave Yost:

And that Supreme Court case, which the democratic attorney general was filed, and they may live to regret the day they did, is now the law of the land. And it applies not just to President Trump's orders, it applies to President Biden's orders. So we're reviewing all those and talking with other states. You can count, I think, on challenges being mounted, but we're not going to do it for political reasons. We're going to focus on making sure that we've got our legal Ps and Qs lined up here.

AG Dave Yost:

Now, with regards to the issue that you've raised, I haven't come to legal conclusions about that. But if you're asking me about the equity of the thing, it certainly seems to me that there's room to respect human beings that say they're transgender and still respect the rights of high school female athletes, with respect to rights of privacy of both men and women with regards to these things. And that's kind of the way that, that's the way America is supposed to work, right? We don't force anybody's religion down other people's throats, but we also let people worship as their conscience dictates, my rights and where yours begin, and I think that's starting to get a little out of balance.

Chris Long:

Well said, and we're going to obviously be looking to state government and the legislature to fight back against the federal leftist overreach coming out of Washington, DC that is going to transgress the rights of men and women and children, obviously, with these kinds of new designs that they are thrusting upon us. Attorney General Dave Yost, thank you for being my guest today. And we wish you all the best and our prayers are with you, sir, as you serve our state.

AG Dave Yost:

Thank you. I always enjoy our conversations, Chris.

Chris Long:

Thank you. God bless you. Well, stay tuned on the other side, we're going to be talking about censorship and the cancel culture. Don't go away. We'll be right back.