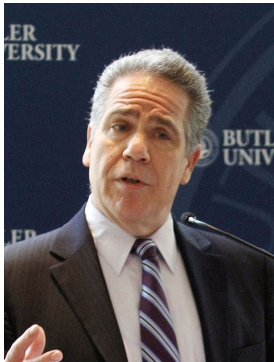


IU, Butler presidents decry 'religious freedom' law

Justin L. Mack justin.mack@indystar.com and Shari Rudavsky shari.rudavsky@indystar.com 9:25 p.m. EDT March 29, 2015

Butler's James Danko says the RFRA has done "significant damage" to the state.



(Photo: Brent Smith/Butler University)

Indiana University President Michael McRobbie and Butler University President James Danko added their voices to the chorus calling upon the state's leaders to rethink the "religious freedom" act signed into law last week.

In statements released Sunday, both campus leaders had no kind words for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which Gov. Mike Pence has said repeatedly is not designed to encourage discrimination.

But in his statement issued Sunday evening, McRobbie noted the "significant negative attention" that the state has received nationally and internationally since passage of the law, which he said many see as "signaling an unwelcoming and discriminatory atmosphere in our state."

The statement went on to call on the state government to reconsider the law, adding, however, that in the wake of its approval, the state will have to work hard to undo the public relations disaster that has occurred.

"(T)he damage already done to Indiana's reputation is such that all public officials and public institutions in our state need to reaffirm our absolute commitment to the Hoosier values of fair treatment and nondiscrimination," McRobbie said.



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Danko also criticized the law, calling it "ill-conceived legislation at best," and asked state leaders to take action.

At first, Danko said he was apprehensive about stepping into the controversy, noting that he's well aware of the importance of open dialogue, critical inquiry and respect for a wide range of opinion.

But he felt compelled to weigh in after hearing from several members of the Butler community.

"While I have read a variety of opinions and rationale for RFRA ... I fear that some of those who advanced it have allowed their personal or political agendas to supersede the best interests of the state of Indiana and its people," Danko said in his statement released Sunday morning. "No matter your opinion of the law, it is hard to argue with the fact it has done significant damage to our state."

"It is our sincere hope that those around the country with their ears turned toward our Hoosier state hear just one thing loud and clear — the united voice of millions who support inclusion and abhor discrimination," Danko said.

Both university presidents affirmed their schools' commitment to creating a welcoming campus environment for all students and a lack of tolerance for discrimination.

Purdue University President Mitch Daniels, Indiana's former governor, has not publicly weighed in on the controversial act.



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