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Published: 11/28/2014

Freedom to discriminate



Cotter - ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the past few years, the social and cultural landscape has changed dramatically around same-sex relationships. Parents such as U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R., Ohio) have acknowledged that the children they love are gay — and insist they deserve to be accepted for who they are and to have the same chance for personal happiness as everyone else.

Same-sex marriages are now legal in nearly two-thirds of states — not including Ohio and Michigan, regrettably. Many observers think the U.S. Supreme Court will soon recognize that all citizens have the right to marriage equality.

Unfortunately, these realities appear lost on Michigan House Speaker-elect Kevin Cotter. The Republican is promoting a measure that would provide a legal path to discriminate under the phony mantle of “religious freedom.”

Michigan lawmakers are meeting in a lame-duck session whose main purpose should be to do something — finally — to repair the state’s wretched roads. There also is interest in expanding Michigan’s civil rights law to include protection for gay, lesbian, and transgender citizens.

Last week, though, Mr. Cotter disdained any interest in that, saying he wants instead to pass a bogus “Religious Freedom Restoration Act.” Michigan, of course, already guarantees freedom of religion under law.

Civil rights lawyers say Mr. Cotter’s proposal would actually provide cover for employers to fire someone just for being gay, or pregnant and unmarried. Aside from being outrageously unfair, and potentially bad

for the state's economy, the legislation is a damaging distraction at a time when Michigan lawmakers have serious work to do.

Outgoing Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville (R., Monroe) has noted that all he has heard from his constituents is: "Just fix the damn roads." His colleagues in both houses of the Legislature, especially Speaker-elect Cotter, would do well to take that advice.

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