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# Barronelle Stutzman: My case should concern everyone

By Barronelle Stutzman For The Spokesman-Review

*Editor's note: Barronelle Stutzman was sued by the state attorney general for refusing to provide flowers for a same-sex wedding. The Washington Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in her case on Tuesday.*

What our state Supreme Court will decide is whether the government has the power to separate my creativity from my soul – by compelling me to create artistic expressions that celebrate something that goes against my conscience.

To enforce that separation, they'll have to violate my constitutional rights to free expression and free exercise of religion. Doing that imposes an unrealistic expectation on what customers can expect from creative professionals ... and, in this case, what a friend can ask of a friend.

Rob Ingersoll and I have been friends since very nearly the first time he walked into my shop. I always thought that must be because Rob “gets it” – what it means to be a particular kind of artist, working to create beautiful messages through flowers and the talents God has given me. All those years, he always asked for me, when he could easily have gone somewhere else for his arrangements. There was never an issue with his being gay (nor has there been with any of my other customers or employees). He just enjoyed my arrangements, and I loved creating them for him.

Since I never hid my faith, I always figured Rob understood that my beliefs shape not only how I look at the world, but how I envision and create my art – the art he appreciated for so long. So it wasn't that I wouldn't create something to celebrate his same-sex wedding – I *couldn't*. This wasn't about selling him flowers, or celebrating a birthday. This involved what, to me, is an event of unique spiritual significance – a sacred covenant. Art, like faith, comes from the heart, from who I am. I couldn't deny my faith – even for so dear a friend – without damaging the very creativity he was asking for.

If you're not a person of faith, that may sound odd. But Rob said he understood, and I took him at his word. He may not have shared my beliefs, but he knew I genuinely cared about him. I still do, and I miss him coming into the shop. But the state is trying to use his case to force me to create artistic expressions that violate my deepest beliefs. It's moving to dissolve my most precious freedom, erode my life's work and savings and take away the financial security of those who work with me.

Yet, I'm not asking for anything that our Constitution hasn't promised me – and you: the right to create freely, and to live out my faith without fear of government punishment or interference.

Does anyone really believe that a government that gives itself the power to force people to believe (and not believe) things and can order artists to create state-sanctioned messages will only use that power to bend one small-town florist to its will – and then leave everyone else alone?

If not, then I respectfully suggest that, even if you don't agree with my faith, you should still hope I win this case. For your sake, as well as mine – because all of our freedoms are at stake.

*Barronelle Stutzman is a Richland florist.*