

**PETITION TO THE U.S. CONGRESS FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES
RESTORING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND LIBERTY TO AMERICA**

2005 Action of Immediate Witness-UUA General Assembly 2005

Amy Beltaine, Delegate and President, First Unitarian Church, Ithaca, New York
Nancy Van Dyke, Delegate and President, UU Women's Federation
Edd Doerr, Delegate, River Road UC, Bethesda, MD

Summary

The Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly of 2005 petitions the U.S. Congress for a redress of grievances where the Congress has denied the religious liberties of Unitarian Universalists and people of other faiths by its enactment of the "Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004". This Act of Congress legislated a specific religious theology of intrauterine and fetal personhood into civil law that violates the religious faith and principles of Unitarian Universalists and persons of other faiths. We petition this Congress to correct its violation of religious freedom by enacting legislation that would nullify or repeal the "Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004".

The "Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004" (H.R. 1997) defines the fertilized ovum (zygote), embryo and fetus as an "unborn child", as a "child *in utero*", that is "a member of the species *homo sapiens*, at any stage of development, who is carried in the womb". This legislation violates the religious beliefs and principles of Unitarian Universalists, which rejects legislation of any "theology of fetal personhood". A UUA General Assembly Resolution of 1982 "oppos(es) all efforts through legislation or constitutional amendment to restrict that right [to terminate a problem pregnancy] or to impose by law a 'theology of fetal personhood'. See: <http://unitarian.ithaca.ny.us/socialJusticeCouncil.html>.

H.R. 1997 violates the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". H.R. 1997 violates the establishment clause by imposing on all women the sectarian faith-based opinion that human personhood begins at conception. It violates the free exercise clause by seeking to restrict the freedom of conscience of women.

This fetal personhood law violates the 14th Amendment, which defines citizens as "persons born" (not the unborn) that are entitled to the protection of the U.S. Constitution.

This fetal personhood law violates the 4th Amendment: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons", which is denied pregnant women where "fetal rights" are placed in conflict with maternal rights. Could the state take into custody a pregnant woman to protect fetal rights that are allegedly endangered by the mother, analogous to seizure of the child because of child endangerment?

This fetal personhood law violates the 13th Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States..." where involuntary servitude to sectarian religious dogma and compulsory motherhood are imposed upon expectant parents and where abortion denied becomes a sentence of compulsory motherhood that could well risk the health and well-being of the mother, her fetus and her born unwanted child.

We affirm that compulsory motherhood is as onerous as compulsory abortion where no pregnant woman is a free woman under the Fetal Personhood Law (H.R. 1997) and where miscarriages could carry a threat of prosecution for involuntary manslaughter due to alleged "maternal negligence".

The additional danger of H.R. 1997 is that it provides a foundation for more draconian State laws that will provide punishments for the crime of "fetal murder".

The UUA 2005 General Assembly petitions all members of Congress to correct this violation of the Constitution by enacting H.R. 1997 and to refrain from passing legislation that imposes any sectarian religious belief or doctrine upon "We, the People".

We further encourage UUA congregations and individual members to petition their Congressional Representatives to nullify or repeal the Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004.